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## The Death Track; OR, The Outlaws of the Mountain.

### CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY.

IN the year 1849, during the rainy season, which forced the miners to leave the diggings, a party of returned miners, Americans, French, Spanish, Mexicans, filled a certain hotel of San Francisco. Material needs being quieted, nearly all entered into an attempt to break the bank presided over by a Frenchman named Vandelles.

A man who seemed well known to all and at whose appearance the names "Don Pablo" and "Steel-arm" began to circulate, stepped up to the gaming-table, and played heavy stakes against the banker.

The latter was speedily "broke," and, besides the gold in dust and pepites, lost a very handsome ring which he wore, and which Steel-arm appeared to be intent on gaining.

Vandelles rushed from the room in rage, but presently returned with a small purse, like one a woman might carry, full of gold dust. He lost this, too, to Don Pablo, or Steel-arm, but the latter forced him to retake the money, and giving him till his next expedition to repay him.

Vandelles resumed his bank.

Soon, a quarrel arose between the banker and three Americans who had entered the room of the hotel.

Two of these Americans were brothers of unusual size and strength, who went by the nickname of the Goliaths, their true names being Tom and Philip Smithson; the third was their cousin, Harry Kellow.

From exchanging such polite appellations as "frog-eater," "thief," "cheating Yankee," and so forth, the four came to blows.

Tom Smithson floored Vandelles and had him under his knee, when another Frenchman, named Ribonne, sprang to help his friend and countrymen.

Then Tom's brother and cousin held Ribonne. Suddenly, as Goliath raised his bowie over Vandelles, the ring broke before Don Pablo, who, wrapping his blanket round his left arm, stepped into the fight. He tore Goliath's knife from his grip and flung it under the table.

Harry Kellow and the other Smithsons fell upon Don Pablo.

The latter, waving back several miners, knocked over Philip, and, receiving Kellow's bowie in the blanket on his left arm, ran him through with his own knife. Harry fell lifeless.

Just then, a shot whistled past Don Pablo's head. He rushed on Philip Smithson, who had fired it, tore the revolver from his grasp, with a power that showed why he had been called Steel-arm, and felled him with the butt end.

Choking Vandelles so that he was powerless, the other Goliath, upsetting Jose Guerino, a Mexican who had thrown himself before Steel-arm in his way, the giant attacked Steel-arm. But he quickly discovered that Don Pablo was more than his match in the management of the knife, so he grasped his antagonist's right arm with his left, an action Don Pablo simultaneously performed.

his wife came out from France, their vessel was wrecked on the Californian coast, and the survivors from the sea were thought to have been nearly all killed by Indians. Bertha Vandelles reached a farm, the Hacienda of San Fernando, where, believing herself a widow, she had not too coldly looked upon the love of Don Pablo Verrers, who was an inhabitant of the hacienda, and who, to love her, broke off an engagement between him and a young Spanish woman, Rosina.

The latter was believed to have drowned herself, in her despair when (Vandelles having made his escape from the savages, and having taken away his wife to San Francisco and then to the mines) Don Pablo set out from the farm after his lost love.

In the present interview between Pablo and Mrs. Vandelles, he, seeing the poverty-stricken aspect of the room, made the lady receive a plan and a claim to a placer, which he, Steel-arm, had found in the country.

Representing Pablo as a friend of her mother's Mrs. Vandelles induced her husband, who needed not much pressing, to accept the gift.

A party was made up, consisting of Vandelles, his wife, Ribonne, an Irishman, named Paddy Shanty, Jose Guerino, Enriquez Mundiaz, and Steel-arm, who was the leader of the expedition.

On the way, one night, two shots were fired at the camp of the gold-hunters, and the bullets were found to be of the same size as those the Goliaths used for their rifles.

Not long afterwards Bertha Vandelles was abducted by two men Ramon and Domingo, who belonged to a band with which the Goliaths had allied themselves to follow the other party to the placer, (whose existence had leaked out despite all precautions), and to be better able to cope with Steel-arm's followers.

These two men who had ridden far from the place of her seizure, stopped in the woods by the river side to play a game of monte, the stake of which was their captive. Seizing the moment

when the two were most intent on their game, Bertha concealed herself in the thicket.

The river, swollen by rains in the mountain, rose and overflowed its banks.

The two abductors after vainly endeavoring to find their late prisoner rode off to secure their own safety.

The poor woman had to climb a tree, and waited there some time before a young German, Luke Kerman, going to the mines, passed by her in a dug-out, and rescuing her, took her to her friends.

Meanwhile, the band of the Goliaths had joined itself with Pablo's, but among



THE OUTLAW OF THE MOUNTAIN.

Here again, the latter was the victor, and the next moment would have seen Goliath's death, but a female voice cried from the door, "Mercy."

This voice produced a great effect on Pablo; he released his assailant and evinced much emotion, but he speedily recovered his coolness.

Next morning, Steel-arm, informed by the hotel boy that Vandelles had gone out with Ribonne, went to the former's room.

The occupant of it was the wife of Vandelles, whose voice had called out mercy for Goliath the previous night.

Two years before this, when Vandelles and



other proofs that the former had committed the abduction of Mrs. Vandelles, Ramon and Domingo were mounted on freshly caught mustangs, a fact alarmingly connected with Pablo, while scouting having found two dead horses in the woods.

When the two bands, marching one of each alternatively, entered a defile on the road, an attack was made by Pablo's party on the other.

Out of the latter fell, all except Tom Smithson, who was allowed to depart with his brother's body, Benito (the husband of the Rosina beforementioned, who had been taken away by him, instead of having committed suicide), and Domingo. Two women, Rosina and Cypriana, were also left.

On the other hand, Pablo's band had lost Mundiaz and Guerino, while the appearance of Bertha and her rescuer, added the latter to her friends.

Benito and Domingo would have suffered death, but imploring him by their former friendship not to harm her husband, Steel-arm not only released the two prisoners, but let them join the party.

They reached the placer, but after some weeks' work, were attacked by Indians whom they beat off. And again a troop of bushrangers commanded by one Manuelito—led thither by Tom Smithson—made an assault upon them unsuccessfully in a cavern, in which the Indian fight had led them to take refuge.

The two or three prisoners who were taken by Pablo's friends, and who died of their wounds very shortly, had time to tell the whole story of Manuelito's band of adventurers, the presence of Tom Smithson among whom gave Pablo much to ponder upon.

His conclusion was anxiously awaited.

## CHAPTER II.

### STEEL-ARM'S STRATAGEM.

"My friends," said he finally, "there is but one course to take. To-morrow we shall be attacked by fifteen or sixteen men, mostly good shots. We cannot hope to resist them, now that we are only seven; then there are also the poor women to be exposed. We must profit by the night to leave the plateau."

"Where will we go?" asked Benito.

"In the cavern where the Indians were. It is a place easy to defend. There, we can fly by the valley as soon as we procure horses."

"They will see us go," said Cradle.

"No; the night is too gloomy and the cabins mask our movements."

"They will quickly see that there is no one in the camp."

"One of us must remain," responded Pablo. "Who will devote himself for his comrade's safety?"

"I will," said Shanty.

"I also," said Luke.

"I also," added Vandelles, but with visible hesitation.

It was not fear.

His temerity in the grotto justified him from that reproach; but he did not wish to renounce life when he hoped soon to revel in his treasures.

"Vandelles risked himself the other day," said Pablo; "it is now the turn of another."

"I am the youngest and weakest," said the German. "Shanty is more useful than I. I will remain."

"True," said Pablo.

Shanty and Vandelles would not allow it, but Steel-arm imposed silence upon them.

"It is decided," said he and we have

no time for discussion. Shanty and Benito, you will dig up the gold, carry it to the edge of the plateau, and tie it to one of the horses. Go! Let the women descend with you to the valley with the necessary things. Take as much food and as many weapons as you can carry. Make as many trips as you have time."

"We have still five hours of night before us," observed Cradle.

"You, Cradle, with Domingo, make holes in the rock just above where we are, and fill them with powder; make as little noise as possible."

"That will be difficult," said Cradle.

"Less so than you suppose. The rock is very soft. Luke will help you for an hour. I will speak to him."

The two miners departed.

They went for their tools in the great cabin before getting to work.

Soon Cradle ceased to hear the sound of his fellow laborer's work.

After a few minutes, the American left his place to see what had become of the vaquero who was not at his post.

As he knew him lazy and prone to rest from work even in the face of danger, Cradle thought he would return and retake his labor.

In a quarter of an hour he had descended the rock to look again for the Mexican.

Scarcely had he made ten steps on the plateau, than he perceived Domingo coming from the opposite side.

"Where were you?" asked he.

"I forgot one of my tools," answered the vaquero.

Then he clambered up the rock, and set to work with an extraordinary ardor for him, even in the most critical circumstances.

"There is something up," muttered the American shaking his head.

He was not wrong.

Domingo had not forgotten a tool.

He had only left his work to listen to the conversation of Steel-arm with Luke.

Shielded by the gloom, he had crawled to within five or six paces of the gambusino, and had not lost but the first words of the following dialogue.

"Have you fully decided?" Steel-arm had asked Luke.

"Wholly."

"I warn you that there is not one chance in a hundred for escape from death."

"No matter."

"Then, listen attentively to the recommendations I am to make. The stream which runs at your feet and which descends from the summit of the angle of the mountain, covers an enormous heap of gold. This mass is precisely in the place where the water falls upon the plateau and takes its horizontal course. This gold, broken from the mountain sides and accumulated by years in this place, forms a sort of block weighing a hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds; perhaps more. I discovered it a long while ago and guarded the secret for some occasion. I did not reveal it, for this new treasure would not satisfy the insatiable thirst of our comrades; so there it still lies covered with stones. Upon an hour more or less depends the life of the women accompanying us."

"I will do my best," murmured Luke sadly.

"In a half an hour, all will be ready for our departure," continued Pablo.

"If God permits us to travel without accident, we shall reach the grotto by sunrise. From what the prisoners said, I do not think the enemy will attack the camp before day. Our silence might appear as some trap, so you had better make a noise from time to time. I will leave you three matches which you are

to light. Dispose them before we leave the plateau. When the enemy rush upon the cabins, take refuge in the mountain, and fire your gun off to attract them. I will leave at that place all the things we cannot carry and also some pepites. The salteadores will run to that place. Then set fire to the match. While the robbers dispute over the spoil, the mine will burst and bring down the overhanging rocks upon their heads. I examined them the other day, and saw that the least shock will make them descend. Then you must escape during the shock. I can but say for you to hope, and to trust in God, who always recompenses courage and devotion. If Providence permits your escape, come to the cave. To warn us of your presence, blow three times the whistle I gave you. One of us shall remain all day and night at the entrance of the grotto to await you. Now, a word upon the nuggets in the stream. Cover them with new stones, for I fear the explosion will leave them up from the sand. If we cannot return for them those miscreants must not profit by them. Have you well understood?"

"Perfectly."

"And you have decided?"

"As before."

The gambusino took Luke's hand and shook it with energy which spoke more than words.

At this moment Shanty came for Pablo.

"I will come," cried the gambusino.

Then when the Irishman had gone, he said:

"Have you no requests for me?"

"Nothing but to say farewell from me to Madam Vandelles and Donna Rosina."

"All is ready, Don Pablo," said Benito approaching.

Steel-arm again shook the young man's hand and went away for a last inspection.

All now came to take leave of Luke.

The men silently shook his hand; the women did so, weeping.

"You will remember me," said Luke to Rosina.

"All the days of my life," replied she tearfully.

On reaching the edge of the plateau the three females mounted the horses. Benito had taken a fourth horse and rode before them.

Pablo, Vandelles, Cradle and Shanty, formed and protected the rear.

They arrived in safety at the cavern, and found Benito waiting at the entrance.

"And Domingo?" inquired Cypriana, looking around for the vaquero.

Domingo had disappeared. His absence seemed much to inquiet Steel-arm.

"Perhaps he lost the way," said Shanty.

"No," replied Pablo, "a rastreador like him is never wrong."

"Do you fear that some accident has occurred to him?" asked Vandelles.

"I fear rather some treason," returned Pablo. "At any rate, we must stay here; he must wait."

"What will become of our horses?" inquired Cradle.

"We will tie bundles of mimosas to their tails and drive them off," said Steel-arm after reflecting. "Pricked by these spurs they will not stop; they fall with fatigue. If by good luck, Goliath's band follow them, it will give us some days the more."

While speaking, Benito, seconded by Steel-arm and Cradle, prepared the fagots of mimosa.

These were attached firmly to the tails of the eight horses; then they turned the heads of the poor animals in the direction of the valley and striking them they went off at a gallop.



A few seconds after, they had disappeared in the profound obscurity of the night; but, for over a dozen minutes, they heard the far-off sounds of their furious course.

The miners listened sadly till the last sound failed to come to them, for they were attached to the noble animals, companions of fatigues and dangers.

Bertha wept silently for Rita.

But there was no other course than the one Steel-arm had counselled.

It was in fact impossible to introduce horses in the entrance.

And if on the other side, they left them grazing by the cave, they would be discovered directly.

"Now," said Pablo, "repose for the rest of the night. To-morrow, we must at all price find the trace of some *cavallada mestena* to recover some horses."

"I am certain that there are some on the other side of the mountain," said Benito.

"I think so too; you will come to-morrow with me."

"If Domingo returns, we must take him also," said the capataz. "He has a particular talent for finding *aguages* (watering places) of wild horses."

"I do not believe we shall again see Domingo," said Steel-arm, shaking his head. "I dread that he will betray us."

"Then, we are lost," said Shanty.

"In any case," added Cradle, "it will be best to conceal all traces of our entering the cavern."

Pablo had not forgotten this precaution.

While the three women reposed in the cave under the guard of Shanty, Benito, Cradle, and the gambusino were at work in masking the opening of the grotto as well as destroying all marks of their passage.

### CHAPTER III.

#### DOMINGO'S TREACHERY.

As had been revealed by the Englishman slain by Cradle, Goliath's band was composed of adventurers of all nations.

All these bandits, expatriated for the most part for some crime, lived by plundering and had no other tie than that safety depended upon their union.

Goliath had, by tampering with it, almost destroyed the authority of Manuelito, the chief of the salteadores.

We have no need to add that these two men cordially hated each other, and each waited for an occasion to defeat his rival.

As for the means, it little mattered if it succeeded.

Their consciences were easy enough in that respect.

The bad result of the nocturnal attack, undertaken against Goliath's advice, had naturally augmented the latter's credit.

Some hours before sunrise, the six salteadores sent in exploration of the mountain united with their comrades, who told them of the events of the night.

Of the seventeen men who had attacked the camp of Steel-arm and the miners, nine were dead, prisoners or grievously wounded.

They had left but fourteen combatants able to fight.

In the wood on the side of the mountain and seven or eight feet below the plateau, the bandits held council.

Fearing to provoke the discontent of his men if he alone decided to march, Manuelito asked of each one his opinion upon the course to be taken.

"And," said he to Goliath, "what is your advice?"

"I have none," replied the American.

"Why not?" said another American.

"You are the only one who can settle this affair. Speak."

"For what good?" said the giant, "for what good, since you will not listen to me?"

"That is true," muttered two or three bushrangers.

"If once we did not do as you wished, it is no reason that we will not listen to you when you have a good idea to offer," said Manuelito ill-humoredly.

"It seems to me that the one I gave this night was not so bad," responded Smithson quickly.

"We see that it is worth while to follow them now," said one of the Americans.

"Possibly," began the salteador; "but let him act now, not talk—"

"Stop, stop," said one of the men, "we must not lose time in quarrels. Now we are all together, shall we make another attack?"

"No," said Goliath, "we are not as numerous as at the first time, and now our enemies are upon their guard."

"True," said Manuelito. "We will wait till morning. But then shall we do so?"

As he finished these words, a noise was heard outside the circle formed by the brigands.

An instant afterwards, two men who were sentinels around the camp, brought in a man whom they had made prisoner.

This prisoner, who was no other than Domingo, appeared noways disquieted and tranquilly regarded the ferocious figures around him.

"What do you want here?" inquired Manuelito roughly.

"Are you the chief?" asked Domingo.

"Yes," replied the salteador.

"No," cried several.

"And who then?" exclaimed Manuelito, disengaging his machete.

"Goliath!" replied the same voices.

There followed a long discussion which Domingo listened tranquilly to.

Goliath cut the discussion short by slaying Manuelito with a pistol-shot through the head, and the chief of the salteadores fell without a sound.

"The thing is decided," said the giant, pushing his rival's corpse away with his foot. "I am now the chief; am I not camarados?"

Cheers replied to him.

The old partisans of Manuelito shouted louder than the others to be pardoned for their former opposition.

Goliath took up the questioning of the prisoner.

"Who are you?" said he. "It seems to me that I've heard your voice. Why, you are Domingo!"

"Himself."

"You have let us take you, brute that you are?"

"No; I came of my own free will."

"Why did you wish to be taken?"

"I came here to bring you good news."

"Speak then."

"I only wish to speak to the chief, senior. Since you are one now, order these noble caballeros to leave us alone a moment."

"You hear?" said Goliath with a horse-laugh. "Go back a little, and quickly."

"We will move away ourselves," said Domingo; "that will make it more sure."

They made a few steps, stopping a dozen yards from the others.

"Well?"

Domingo reflected.

The rogue had heard a great portion of the conversation between Steel-arm and Luke Kermain.

From that moment he had but one desire: that of digging up the block of gold and keeping it for himself.

That was why he had left Steel-arm's band and why he had given himself up to Goliath.

The vacquero thought for a moment to let the bandits enter the abandoned camp before Luke could spring the mine; but this plan presented no advantage.

The salteadores might find the treasure, or Luke, if captured, might reveal the secret.

Finally, what was perhaps more important was that Goliath's troop had no more force than Steel-arm's friends.

"Will you speak?" said the giant, angrily.

"Yes," replied Domingo, revealing the secret of the cavern.

"We can smoke them out," said Goliath.

"Stop a moment," interposed Domingo.

"What for?"

"Do you think it was only to render you a service that I came here?"

"For what, then?"

"I must have a share of the treasure which you find in the cave."

"Have you got much gold?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Sixty or seventy thousand dollars," replied the vacquero, who judged it prudent not to reveal all the truth.

"Oho! Well, what do you want for your share?"

"A third."

"Yes—but suppose I were to pay your treachery by this?" said Goliath, tapping the butt of his revolver significantly.

"You will not find the cavern, that's all," replied Domingo, very little reassured, nevertheless.

"And if I were to roast you by a fire till I gained the secret?" said Smithson.

Domingo made a bound, and disappeared in the obscurity.

"Come back," cried the American, "I was joking."

Domingo slowly returned, looking about him suspiciously.

"Shall I have a third of the booty?"

"Yes."

"You swear it?"

"I give you my word."

"But I want something I can more safely rely on."

"None of your 'sass.'"

"Caramba! we know each other too well to be offended at these little precautions."

"Well! what other guarantee would you have me give?"

Domingo knew of none himself.

"Bah!" said he at last, "I have something better than all your promises."

"What is it?"

"Your interest. Call your comrades, and let us go."

At the sound of Goliath's voice, the salteadores flocked around him.

He recounted to them some of Domingo's words.

Three-quarters of an hour before sunrise the band took up the march.

When a little distance from the opening, the bandits began to creep.

The sun commenced to appear in the horizon, and it was important for them to advantage of the lingering twilight.

They reached the entrance of the grotto without having perceived anything which would lead them to suppose they were discovered.

"Now we will enter," said Domingo, though he did not offer to lead the troop.

"Pass first," replied Goliath.

"Why?"

"Why? Because your appearance will not excite suspicion. They will believe you have returned. The others will come behind you, and profit by the



confusion of your arrival to attack them."

Domingo would still have resisted, but the American pushed him before him into the entrance, and followed, a revolver in his hand and a knife between his teeth.

The other bandits were armed the same, and all disappeared in the humid and gloomy passage.

We must now inform our readers of what has become of Steel-arm's companions.

Their first care had been to take all necessary precautions to repel an attack of their enemies.

Pablo commenced by digging in the passage, to the right and left, excavations large enough for a man to rest if he contracted his limbs.

Shanty and Cradle, upon the coolness of whom Pablo could depend, were placed in these retreats.

Thus it was agreed: as soon as a certain number of enemies had entered the grotto, Steel-arm was to fire a pistol-shot and cry:

"Forward, miners!"

At this signal, Shanty and Cradle were to leave their posts and stop the progress of the other bandits.

They were at the same time to stop the retreat of the ones already entered.

They made, for that purpose, two lances with daggers bound to poles.

As complete darkness reigned within the cavern, two men—one in front, the other in the rear—would suffice to stop, on one side the bandits retreating, and on the other the assailants.

The length of their weapon precluded all idea of being resisted by bowie-knives or machetes, and the excavations in which they were hidden rendered the same service in respect to pistol-shots.

Their hands alone ran the risk of being struck.

They loaded beforehand all the guns and pistols, which were arranged within reach of the miners.

The latter were stationed by the wall of the cavern at an angle formed by the passage, which was in the centre of the circle formed by the cave.

Benito, who was sentinel in the passage near the opening, soon returned to his comrades, announcing that he heard a noise at the foot of the mountain.

Every one went to his post.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE ASSAULT UPON THE CAVERN.

SOME minutes passed.

Finally they heard a slight noise, imperceptible even to them if they had not been forewarned.

Soon the sound increased, though those who caused it evidently made efforts to repress it.

From time to time, the bandits stopped and listened before going farther.

Then, reassured by the absolute silence around them, they retook their march.

At last the head of a man appeared at the interior orifice of the passage.

Seeing nothing around him, he entered.

Another man followed, then a third and a fourth.

At the moment when the fifth in his turn entered the cavern, Pablo bounded upon the two first, giving the expected signal.

The miners' knowledge of the place and the surprise of their enemies gave an immense advantage to the gold-seekers.

Domingo was the first victim, Vandelles having killed him with one blow on the head.

Goliath, though a bullet had struck him, threw himself upon Steel-arm and tried to strike him with his knife.

His rush was so impetuous that the Californian was upset under his enormous mass, and the two rolled on the ground.

Fury and desperation redoubled the extraordinary strength of the giant.

His fists, nails and teeth, Goliath employed against his enemy.

The colossus growled like a ferocious beast, and accompanied each blow with a malediction.

By a desperate effort, Steel-arm rose to his feet, raising Goliath, who clung to his belt, with him.

Unfortunately for Pablo, his pistol had fallen during the struggle.

Goliath got one of his hands free and uttered a cry of triumph.

Pablo bounded backwards five or six paces from the giant.

While the latter advanced cautiously, seeking to distinguish him in the obscurity, Pablo hastily pulled off his vest, thrust the end of his machete in it, and raised it with one hand while he himself crouched down on the ground.

On perceiving the buttons of the vest sparkling in the gloom, Goliath fired at it.

The report of the pistol still was ringing as Pablo rushed upon the colossus.

With the rapidity of thought, he struck him twice with his machete full in the breast.

Mortally wounded, Goliath darted forward like a bull upon his adversary.

But Pablo had expected this movement of despair.

He extended his machete, the blade of which penetrated almost to the hilt in the giant's breast.

Goliath fell, cursing most horribly.

A few minutes after, and he was a corpse.

Every one of Steel-arm's friends had need of his succor.

As we have said, Vandelles had cut open Domingo's skull with a sword-thrust.

But he was immediately seized by the throat by a salteador, whose strength was equal to his own.

Without the advantage of knowing the nature of the ground, Vandelles would probably have been defeated.

Happily for him, the bush-ranger stumbled over a rock.

As he threw his hands forward to recover his balance, Vandelles fell upon him.

Bewildered by the shock, the bandit could not parry the blows of the Frenchman, who finished by stabbing him in the throat.

During this time, Shanty and Benito did their best against the three other foes and two robbers who had entered the cave during the assault.

At the same moment as the last of the nine robbers who had penetrated within the grotto was dispatched, Cradle left his post and showed to Steel-arm his spear, the wood of which was severed from the iron.

"The thieves are upon us," said he to Pablo.

The gold-hunters hastened to throw the bodies in a corner of the grotto, and then each one took his position.

Five bandits came from the passage.

Steel-arm gave the signal, and they were literally cut to pieces.

All at once, Pablo thought he saw something gliding along the ground towards them.

He bent down and seized a man by the legs, but he had already given the alarm to his comrades.

Pablo, in spite of his endeavors to cling to the rock, dragged him to the cavern, where he was speedily dispatched.

Then Steel-arm discharged all the barrels of his revolver along the passage.

The cries of rage and pain succeeding the detonations led the miners to suppose that the balls had struck the salteadores.

"We must pursue them," said Pablo "follow me."

He darted into the passage and began crawling in pursuit of the bush-rangers, who fled before him.

Two corpses lying in the way retarded him a little, as there was no room but for a single person.

He had to push them into the holes made for Shanty and Cradle before he could continue his course.

When he arrived at the exterior opening, he perceived the salteadores assembled a hundred paces off from the mountain, probably occupied in holding council.

They numbered but seven.

On seeing the miners leave the cavern one by one, they seized their guns and precipitately fired upon them.

Pablo's companions had expected the reception.

Before the salteadores had raised their guns to their shoulders, the miners had thrown themselves down behind some rocks.

Feeling the dangers of their position, the bandits ran with all speed towards some trees fifty or sixty paces distant.

Three of them were stopped in their flight by bullets from Steel-arm, Cradle, and Shanty.

The four who remained saw the uselessness of a long resistance, and retook their course with all the swiftness of their limbs.

They were pursued for some time, but they soon disappeared in the depths of the forest.

Steel-arm and Benito were sufficiently agile to prevent their escape, but the former had received a wound in the leg which, though slight, hindered him from using all his power.

As for Benito, he was little anxious to approach too near to the pursued when armed with rifles.

"You can let them go," said he to the Californian. "I will wager that they will not return to torment us."

"Then let us go back to the grotto," said Cradle; "I have a devilish appetite."

"Hasten," said Pablo; "we must go and see what has become of poor Luke."

The miners returned to the cavern.

A sentinel remained at the entrance of the passage to watch that they were not surprised by the salteadores or some new enemies.

Rosina and Bertha came running to meet the miners.

The latter had received but slight wounds.

Cradle had received the worst; a bowie-knife had gashed his shoulder.

"Where is Cypriana?" inquired Steel-arm.

"She is weeping and crying over Domingo's body," replied Rosina. "Now she appears calmer."

"Has she not threatened us, or said words of vengeance?"

"Yes," responded Rosina; "but pardon the first moments of grief."

"Of course," said Pablo. "Nevertheless, she should be watched."

"What shall we do with these corpses?" demanded Vandelles, pointing to the bodies in a corner.

"Throw them outside."

The miners carried the bodies to the opening of the cavern opposite to the little passages, and threw them behind some rocks.

In their eagerness to run to the rescue of Luke, they were obliged to put off the care of rendering the last duties to them till the next day.



They hastened to take some food and started for their former encampment, leaving in the cave Shanty and Benito as sentinels, one at each extremity, and Cypriana who revolved in her head projects of revenge against the murderers of her lover.

It was evident that the miners had but used their right in slaying the traitor, but Cypriana hated instinctively all the miners save Luke and Benito, and would not listen to reason.

They found Luke at the post assigned to him by Steel-arm.

After the first transport of joy at again seeing him had passed, they occupied themselves in following the trail of the last of Manuelito's troop.

Benito and Pablo were convinced that the fugitives had taken the road of the mountain, and by that they endeavored to gain the valley situated on the other side of the Sierra Zatecas.

Pablo then decided to reveal to his comrades the secret of the accumulation of gold at the foot of the mountain.

It was decided that Vandelles and Shanty were to extract and transport the gold, while Steel-arm and Benito were to find some resting-place of wild horses.

Luke and Cradle were left in the cavern with Bertha, Rosina and Cypriana.

The next day, before the rising of the sun, the miners departed for their diverse missions.

In two days the miners collected from the gold amassed at the mountain, nearly one hundred and seventy pounds of gold of the value of forty-four thousand dollars.

Steel-arm and Benito were less successful in their researches.

It was not till the end of five days that they discovered an aguage, around which were traces that it was the habitual course of wild horses.

Unfortunately the gold-seekers were not numerous enough for the projected chase.

It requires twenty men at least, and the miners were but six, if all left the grotto at the same time.

"There is one way," said Benito. "We must block up the entrance to the grotto on the side of the plateau with stones and earth. We will leave the women there. After our departure they can draw up the ladder."

"A man must remain with them," said Steel-arm.

"Then we will not have enough to drive the horses into the corral."

"That is true," said Vandelles, "Benito is right."

"Well," interposed Bertha, "there is still another means. We will all three go with you to the aguage. We can then prepare your repasts."

"Yes," said Benito, "but we shall be three or four days constructing our corral."

"The more reason we should follow you," said Bertha; "is it not Rosina?"

"Certainly," replied the Spaniard.

"And what of our baggage?" cried Cradle.

"Leave it in the cavern."

"So be it," said Pablo reflecting.

"Make all ready this evening."

"What do we want?" inquired Cradle.

"Hatchets, ropes, spurs, *bozals*, (a sort of horsehair snaffle), *reatas* (thongs) and lassoes."

"And saddles," added Luke.

"They are here," replied Vandelles.

"We took care to take of the bridles and saddles of our poor horses before sending them off in the valley."

"Let us go after them," cried Shanty.

"How can we get to the other side of the mountain?" asked Pablo. "It will take more than five days for that. Be-

sides we could never get them up the sides of the sierra.

"What provisions will be needed?" demanded Cradle.

"Meal for pinole," returned Pablo, "tea, brandy and salt."

"Very nourishing," muttered Cradle.

"We must have as little to carry as possible," said Steel-arm. "Besides we may find game. Cradle must be left behind to draw up the ladder," added he.

"I will remain, too," said Cypriana.

"Very well. Now to work."

The next day, at daybreak, the miners quitted the cavern and descended into the valley.

Before going, Pablo had taken the precaution to bury the gold in a place the secret of which was only known to Vandelles, Shanty and Luke who had assisted him in the labor.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE CAPTURE OF THE MUSTANGS.

THE first day was almost entirely spent in reaching the horse-pond discovered by Benito.

The second day, the trees were cut to form the corral, which is an elliptical circle near the aguage.

They commenced by observing the route followed by the mustangs in going to water.

On each side of this route are planted trees bound together by ropes, branches and twigs.

At the extremity of the corral is what is called the *estero*, a passage very narrow, which can be quickly closed with long pieces of wood.

The instant the horses pass this opening, the men hastily close with bars the *estero* at each end of the corral.

Then the prisoners are lassoed.

In these hunts in Mexico, the numerous domestics, peons, vaqueros, etc., aid the hunters by forcing the animals back into the corral with their cries and shouts.

This time, the miners had scarcely the twentieth part of the necessary number for this work.

They were devoid of horses, another inestimable aid in producing a good result.

Besides, Steel-arm and Benito were the only ones who perfectly understood the precautions to take.

Vandelles was a good horseman, and could throw the lasso extremely well for an European, but much inferior to the least skilful vaquero.

Preparations occupied three days.

The miners were forced to stop work and enter the forest at the hours when the horses came to drink.

Instead of one corral, Pablo had had two constructed.

Steel-arm feared that the horses would notice the presence of the hunters, and take flight at the decisive moment.

So he had recourse to every precaution known to him.

These, though they caused some hours' more labor, were amply rewarded, for the horses continued to come to the water without suspicion.

To reassure them the better, the miners for two days left the neighborhood.

Vandelles and Shanty profited by this period to go back to the cave.

Their operations being henceforth but to endure a day or two, they brought Cradle with them, his wound having nearly healed.

On hearing that Cypriana was left alone in the cave, Steel-arm was very uneasy.

"You were wrong to leave your post," said he to the American.

"Do you fear for our gold?"

"I distrust Cypriana."

"What can she do against us?"

"It may be more than you think," returned Steel-arm. "But let that go. To-morrow one of us shall return to the cavern. Now for the hunt."

During all the morning, Pablo, Benito and Shanty scoured the neighborhood to drive the wild horses to the watering-place.

Cradle and Kermain were stationed at the *esteros* to close the barriers when the troop entered the enclosure.

The two females were placed in the branches of two *abuhueits*, ten or fifteen feet from the ground, where they could see all without danger.

About one o'clock in the afternoon, the cries of the four trackers began to approach.

Soon they heard a sound similar to a violent storm.

The troop galloped along, breaking down everything in its approach.

Furious snortings from time to time came intermingled with the crashing of boughs, crackling of twigs, and the sound of the stones under the hoofs of the mustangs.

Soon the cavallada entered the avenue, formed by the miners, which led to the corral.

This was the decisive moment.

The horses now advanced with a kind of repugnance, as if they suspected some trap.

At the sight of their pursuers, the savage animals resumed their course; but, on nearing the enclosure, the stallions which led the troop tossed in the air their smoking nostrils, quivered their ears, and stopped.

They evidently felt the presence of man and seemed disposed to turn back.

The men instantly rushed upon them, striking them with thongs amid loud cries.

The cavallada rushed forward like a torrent, and a minute after, they were entirely in the enclosure.

Unfortunately, Luke, unaccustomed to this hunt, had not time to close the *estero*.

Before he had placed the last bar up, a dozen horses bounded over the incomplete barrier and were lost to view.

Luke did not lose his coolness, but finished his task, and the horses were finally imprisoned.

There were thirty or forty mustangs, snorting, neighing, leaping, kicking the walls of the enclosure, fighting with each other, and running around with rage and fury.

Some of them attempted to leap the barriers, but they being nine or ten feet high, their endeavors were unsuccessful.

As the hunters had no horses, it was dangerous for them to enter the enclosure to lasso the captives.

They had calculated that eighteen horses would suffice for the journey; nine serving as steeds, five to carry baggage; the four last to replace those who were disabled by any accident.

As it was impossible that six men could each break three horses, it was agreed that they should first take but six horses.

The others were to be left to be tamed by hunger and thirst.

Once enfeebled, they could be broken in much easier.

"How the deuce can we enter?" said Shanty, pointing to the corral.

"There is a way," said Steel-arm, "Benito, you, Vandelles and I will crawl with our lassoes outside the corral. We will climb the trees above them. Luke and Cradle will mount upon the barrier and shout at the horses. They will run towards us, and we can lasso them, or drive them into the little en-



closure, and separate them from the others. We will have nothing more to do than to saddle them."

"I understand now why you had a double corral made," observed Cradle.

A quarter of an hour after, seven horses were driven into the small enclosure.

Their future riders carried a saddle and a snaffle with them as they entered.

The prisoners were seized one after another by the aid of the terrible lasso which Steel-arm and Benito wielded with such prodigious skill.

As soon as a capture was made, a thick blanket was thrown over his eyes.

He then rested, trembling in all his limbs.

A Mexican saddle with a raised pommel was strapped to his back.

The bozal was then fitted upon his nostrils, serving at the same time for bridle and snaffle.

Two horses, though, fought so sturdily against these operations that they were forced to hold them with two lassoes, one around the fore legs, the other around the hind legs, which were pulled taut in opposite directions.

Then they mounted the horses which were reserved.

It was decided that Cradle should remain with Bertha and Rosina.

The bars of the little corral were let down, and he hastily put them back as the horses left it.

Furious at having their sides compressed by the flaps of the saddle and by the knees of the horseman, irritated by the pricking of the spurs, by the large stirrups and by the pressure of the snaffle, the horses rushed from the corral like the wind.

Some took their course towards the forest with prodigious bounds.

Others, would stop, leaping up, snorting, neighing, shaking, bounding from side to side, and turning around on their hind legs as on a pivot.

Others, again, endeavored to rub their rider against the trunk of a tree, from which they were turned by the spurs or beaten with thongs which bent around the supple body of the steed.

The one Steel-arm had mounted, the finest but most ferocious of the troop, rolled on the ground in his shudders of impotent rage.

Standing by the furious animal, Pablo waited till the mustang rose.

Scarcely had the horse got upon his nervous legs, than Steel-arm was again in the saddle.

In the end, the mustang, maddened by the spur, followed his companions.

He made five or six bounds and darted towards the forest.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CYPRIANA'S REVENGE

BERTHA and Rosina had witnessed the hunt with an anxiety easy to be understood.

Habituated to these struggles between horsemen and wild horses which she had seen every year in her family's hacienda, Rosina felt less inquietude than Bertha.

The latter was pale as death and scarcely breathed.

"The horses will kill them against some tree or rock," murmured she, wringing her hands.

"No," replied the Spaniard, with some pride; "you do not yet know the horsemen of our country. Perhaps the other-

may fail, but I am sure Steel-arm and Benito will bring back their steeds completely quebrantados (broken)."

"But my husband?"

"He rides well for a foreigner" re-

sponded Rosina. "The least skilful is Shanty, but as he is strong, he perhaps will not fall."

"How long will they be gone?" asked Bertha.

"Two or three hours, perhaps more. That depends upon the vigor of the horses. They cannot stay together, but will return one by one—and in such a state! all torn by branches and briars, except Steel-arm. I do not know how he keeps on a horse, but he always preserves himself. Benito is one of the best breakers-in of horses in the country, but Pablo is much better than him."

"I see them returning!" said Bertha, after a long silence.

They indeed returned one after another, leading behind them the horses covered with sweat and blood from the cuts made by the spurs.

Benito was the first.

Steel-arm alone had not appeared.

While waiting for Pablo, whose delay they could not explain, Benito transposed his saddle upon the back of one of the horses which remained in the little corral.

The capataz proposed to break another steed before returning to the cavern.

As he leaped into the saddle, they perceived Pablo coming.

The gambusino halted within a few paces of the miners, reining in his horse all covered with sweat.

"I am pursued by a band of Indians," said he hastily. "Run quick to the cavern and stay there. I have misled the Indians, and by that gained some moments of advance upon them. But they will soon find my trail, and again pursue me. So lose not an instant."

"Who are the Indians?" demanded Vandelles.

"Apaches, the most cruel of all," said Steel-arm. "Take your wife on the saddle. Benito, you to Donna Rosina. Go. Once in the cavern, let the horses go, but keep the saddles. Go quickly!"

"And you, Don Pablo?" inquired Shanty.

"I will let the Indians see me, and will lead them away before they have seen the corral."

"You will return to the cavern?"

"Yes. Three barks of the coyote will warn you of my presence and you can throw me a rope!"

"The Indians may perhaps divide into two bands, as they often do," said Benito. "You should take some one with you to help you if an accident should occur."

"You are already so few!" responded Pablo, who tightened the strap of the saddle and laved with fresh water the smoking nostrils of his steed.

Let me accompany you, Don Pablo?" cried Luke.

"Well, my lad, yes," replied Steel-arm. "Bend down in the saddle to avoid the branches. Farewell, friends."

He went off at a gallop followed by Luke who valiantly resisted the bounds of his savage steed.

While Steel-arm was speaking the miners had made the preparations for departure.

At the same time as when the gambusino disappeared in the prairie, the gold-seekers turned their horses heads towards the cavern.

The difficulty was to go in the wished for direction, as the horses still struggled furiously, and would not obey until after a long resistance to the wills of their riders.

Once started, the gallop was continued till the cave was reached.

On arriving at the foot of the mountain, the miners shouted loudly for Cypriana, who had promised to stay at the entrance of the grotto to throw them a ladder.

She was some minutes before appearing.

"Hurry up," shouted Cradle in a stentorian voice. "We are pursued by Indians."

As he said the words, Cypriana advanced her head above the rock.

"Ah! do the Indians pursue you?" repeated she with a singular accent.

"Throw us the ladder!" cried Vandelles.

"Wait till it pleases me to give it," replied Cypriana, receding a little.

"What do you say, impertinent block-head?" cried Vandelles.

"I say, for a long while I have borne your taunts and your scorn. I say you killed my Domingo and I shall revenge him."

"Cypriana," said Benito, preventing Vandelles from retorting, "Domingo was a traitor who sacrificed his friends and yourself to his cupidity. Death was the proper punishment for his treachery. Besides he came to attack us."

This reasoning was very just, but Cypriana was in one of those fits of exasperation in which one never listens. Since Domingo's death she had in her head nothing but plans of revenge in which her pride went for more than her affection for the vaquero.

By being left alone in the cavern she had now a means of executing her sinister projects.

In vain they attempted to make her comprehend that she herself would, alone in these vast solitudes, have no other perspective than perishing by hunger, being devoured by wild beasts, or becoming the prey of the Indians.

Maddened by her reveries, and by long concentrated hate, she found a savage pleasure in satisfying her vengeance, even at the price of life.

The supplications of Bertha and Rosina added to her obstinacy as well as the menaces of the miners.

The first thought of the latter was to climb the rock, but the ascent was given up in despair.

"What is to be done?" said Cradle, accompanying his question with a series of oaths.

All gave their advice, but not one overcame the difficulty.

Minutes were precious.

The Indians at any moment might arrive.

While they consulted, they heard the rapid gallop of a horse approaching the cavern.

The miners seized their weapons and stood on the defence.

Soon Steel-arm arrived by them.

"What are you doing here?" cried he. "Hasten. The Indians follow me. They will be here in ten minutes."

They hurriedly explained to him the treachery of Cypriana.

"There is a way," cried Cradle of a sudden.

"Speak quick," said the others to the American.

"We have hatchets. Let us cut down three high trees and tie them together like a ladder."

"How can we climb to the top?" demanded Shanty.

"Cut notches in them for the feet."

"Cradle is right," said Steel-arm. "Execute his plan. Has Luke returned?" demanded he, while the miners, in spite of the obscurity, worked with precipitation.

"No," replied Bertha.

"Poor fellow! he is taken. He was shot by an arrow in the arm, and I fear he could not manage his horse."

"You met the Indians?"

"Yes. They sent a flight of arrows at us. Luke followed me for some time, but perhaps his horse was wounded. I will go to his rescue."



"But if the redskins arrive before the senoras are in safety within the cave?" interrupted Benito.

"Poor Luke," murmured Steel-arm sadly.

Then followed a lugubrious silence, only broken by the sound of the hatchets at work.

"Listen," suddenly cried Pablo. "Stop! Silence."

They heard in the distance the gallop of many horses.

"They are the Apaches," said Pablo. "If they come here, we are lost."

"What is to be done?" muttered Benito.

"I must risk all," said Pablo; "I will try to lead them away."

He leaped upon the horse which appeared least fatigued, and galloped off, recommending silence for some time, and for them to use the saw instead of the axe.

It was a moment of terrible anxiety.

For two or three minutes, the sound of the horses continued to approach.

The miners, motionless, retained their breath and dared not move a limb.

Soon, though, the sound appeared to be less distinct and the miners retook their task with feverish ardor.

Notwithstanding the gloom, they promptly fashioned the species of ladder proposed by Cradle.

This was leaned against the rock with as little noise as possible so as not to awaken Cypriana's attention.

Benito, the lightest, most supple and agile of all, mounted the first, using the steps hewn in it alternatively to the right and left upon the trees.

At the moment when he neared the top, he perceived that the ladder wanted three feet or more of touching the level of the cavern. He placed his hands up, dug his nails in the stone, and raised himself with all his strength.

Till then, the darkness had prevented Cypriana from perceiving the miners' intention.

The dragging of the trees along the rock had excited her attention.

She leaned from the opening of the grotto and found herself face to face with the capataz, whom she did not recognize.

By an instinctive movement, she repulsed Benito, who nearly fell backwards and only sustained himself by a superhuman effort.

She then tried to stab him with her navaja as he, with his knees on the ground, attempted to rise.

Cypriana's hand, trembling with fright and surprise, misdirected the weapon which struck the shoulder of the capataz.

He rose furious, and rushed upon Cypriana, whom he slew with one blow of his knife.

Then he went in search of the rope-ladder, which fortunately was near at hand.

Five minutes afterwards, all were in safety within the cavern.

They hastened to eat a morsel and throw themselves upon their beds of dry leaves.

Each one was to watch in his turn for the Indians and for the return of Steel-arm and Luke.

At the moment when Vandelles, who had the first watch of two hours, awoke, he heard the three barks of the coyote agreed upon by Steel-arm.

He hastened to throw the ladder to the gambusino.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE RESCUE OF LUKE

"LUKE?" asked Pablo, on putting his foot in the grotto.

"No news."

"Then he is in the hands of the In-

dians. We shall probably know where he is, for the Apaches are coming. They lost sight of me, but they will soon discover my trail."

"Where is your horse?"

"I let him go. He galloped to join the cavallada. My saddle is hidden in the mimosa clump."

"Is there not some way of carrying aid to Luke? Can I not descend into the valley to search for him?"

"You cannot find Luke," replied Steel-arm, "and you will betray the secret of our retreat."

"What can we do?" inquired Cradle.

"Why by the other entrance to the grotto."

"But then we——"

"Still," interrupted Pablo. "Listen!"

The gallop of horses were heard.

"The Indians," muttered Pablo.

He arranged himself at the extremity of the cave in such a manner that only his forehead and eyes passed the edge of the rock.

Ten minutes afterwards, the savages arrived at the foot of the mountain.

The obscurity was such that they could not distinguish horses or riders, but Pablo with his well trained ear, counted them from the sounds which came from the valley.

They heard the Indians dismount and lead away their mustangs, which they fastened in the neighborhood.

Part of the savages lit a great fire seven or eight hundred paces from the cavern.

Others bearing flaming brands searched for the tracks of their enemies.

They reached the foot of the mountain.

By the light of their torches, the miners could see them bending to the earth or looking around to each other, as if asking what had become of the whites whose tracks they had traced to here.

More than an hour was passed in examining the flanks of the sierra, hoping to find some marks of climbing, but the miners had taken their precautions against that.

The fire which they unceasingly replenished with dead branches, commenced to throw a brighter glare around to the distance of twenty-five or thirty feet.

"Luke is a prisoner," said Pablo, touching Vandelles with his hand.

The Frenchman looked in the denoted direction and perceived that Kermain was indeed near the fire, securely bound.

His face was covered with blood, and his half-closed eyes revealed his fatigue and exhaustion.

Soon one of the Indians, apparently the chief, approached the young German.

He cut some of his bonds, raised him, and seemed to be questioning him.

At first he had the air of making promises, but then he shook his machete in the young man's face.

Luke remained impassible.

"They wish to know of Luke where we are," said Pablo. "They lead him to the rock, to the place where they lost the trail."

The Indians, indeed, conducted Luke to the mountain; he no doubt refused to give them any information, for he was taken back to the fire.

Two of the savages cut down a tree of a foot in diameter, and drove it into the earth several feet.

"What are they going to do?" inquired Vandelles.

"They are about to torture the poor lad to make him reveal our retreat," said Pablo, with quivering voice.

"We can't let that be done," said Vandelles; "we must——"

"Silence," interrupted Pablo; "listen; Cradle, Vandelles and Benito, you will pull down the rubbish we put in the

other entrance. When it is nearly all down, let me know; we will send the women forward under the charge of two of us. Then, we others will do all that man can to rescue poor Luke."

"But that work will take some hours," cried Shanty, "and the poor lad will be dead."

"Heaven is my witness that I would give my life for Luke's but, for one, I cannot sacrifice seven persons."

"I will descend alone, then," said Shanty.

He took a rope and tied it to the end of some projections of the rock.

Pablo brought him to where Bertha and Rosina had retired.

"Look," said Steel-arm, pointing to the two women who vainly endeavored to dissimulate their anguish. "Would you have in an hour, these poor creatures in the hands of the Indians? Their fate would be more frightful than Luke's."

"I am a single man," muttered the Irishman.

"Do you think you alone can save Luke? No! What will be the result of your foolish attempt? The savages will see how you came, and quickly enter our retreat. Think of the consequence—of the fate which awaits those poor women whom you swore to help!"

Shanty let his head fall upon his breast and covered his face with his hands.

Pablo went to Bertha and Rosina.

"We are obliged to leave this shelter," said he to them. "Prepare provisions quickly."

He explained other duties to be accomplished and left them to return to the mouth of the cave.

Kermain was tied to the post near the fire, the flames of which caused him cruel sufferings.

The Indians were amusing themselves by shooting arrows as near as possible to him without touching him.

Some unskilful marksmen had doubtless struck the unfortunate victim, for several streaks of blood marked Luke's face and body.

From time to time, the chief made a sign for the savages to stop, and approached Kermain, speaking to him rather insinuatingly than threateningly.

Every time Luke replied by a negative shake of the head.

Pablo easily divined that the Indian wished to learn the hiding-place of the gold-seekers, and that Luke refused to save his life at the price of betraying his friends.

His persecutors soon left off this useless torment.

They took some blazing brands from the fire and passed them over Luke's body.

Steel-arm saw the unfortunate victim writhe and shudder under each new infliction.

This frightful sight caused such an impression upon the Californian, that he felt his teeth grind and his nails bury themselves in his clenched hands each time that the torch touched Luke's body.

Pablo, notwithstanding his self-command, was often compelled to turn away his eyes.

Then he would look to where his comrades were opening the closed up passage of the opposite side.

Three-quarters of an hour passed thus.

As Pablo was still turned to the other entrance, he heard steps near him.

It was Benito approaching.

"Is that finished?" demanded Steel arm.

"No, thank Heaven," replied the capataz.

"What?"

"There are Indians on that side as well as here."



"Indians! are you sure?"

"Yes, too sure, unfortunately."

"How do you know it?"

"There was a little crack in the rock above the passage. I ran my pike into the crack to see how much farther we had to dig. After I had added a pole to my pike, it went completely through, and a little light came in. I made the hole larger, and I saw there was a fire, around which many men were seated; others passed and repassed. We could not count them, but they are very numerous."

In spite of his courage, Pablo remained an instant crushed by the weight of this new misfortune.

"We are lost!" murmured he at last. "Load your arms, take your gold and some food, and Heaven protect us."

The miners in ten minutes' space were all ready to go.

Pablo and Shanty had taken part of the gold destined for Vandelles, who could carry but sixty pounds.

Bertha had twenty.

The other miners had their share.

The most difficult portion of the enterprise was to descend the rocks without awakening the attention of the savages.

Fortunately, the latter had suspended Luke's torture, and, overcome by sleep and weariness, put off till the morrow the spectacle, so alluring to the red men, of the sufferings of an enemy.

They ceased to keep up the fire which smouldered without sending up a flame.

The Indians were collected around the fire, sleeping.

A few sentinels alone watched over their safety.

Happily, no one was stationed at the foot of the mountain, for its height and steepness precluded all idea of attack from that quarter.

As for Luke, his butchers had left him tied to the post after giving him some food.

He was covered with blood, and trembled with cold, pain, and fever.

When Pablo had completely understood the situation of the Indians, he turned towards the miners and made them a sign of attention.

"The horses of the Indians are to the right there, behind the little clump of trees. Cradle, Shanty and I will rush to Luke and deliver him. You will profit by the tumult to run to the mustangs. Mount and drive off to the aguage. Follow the course of the river and spur on till the horses fall with fatigue. Take care to drive before you all the mustangs so that the Indians will have none to pursue you with. Let Benito lead you a little, and as soon as possible bring back four horses or so to us."

"How shall I know you?" inquired Benito; "one cannot see ten paces off."

"I will imitate the bark of the coyote," replied Steel-arm.

"The difficulty will be to descend without being perceived," said Cradle. "These cursed redskins have eyes like cats."

"Their fire is dull," said Pablo, "and it does not send out any flame."

"How will we descend?" asked Vandelles.

"The men by a knotted cord; the women by the ladder."

"Hasten," said Benito, throwing a last look towards the other entrance.

"I do not know whether the Indians have or have not heard the sound of our work, or they may have perceived some light, but they are breaking in. You can hear them. By good luck, they have not begun in the right place."

"Let us go," returned Pablo.

He shook hands with Bertha and Rosina, and gave the signal of departure.

Pablo and Benito descended the first to hold the ladder so that the descent of the women might be facilitated.

The miners hastened to follow, for the voices of the savages might be heard at the other extremity of the grotto.

Thinking all perfectly safe on the side of the cave, the Apaches concentrated all their attention upon the prairies and the little thicket which was opposite to the sierra.

Owing to this circumstance, the miners were enabled to descend without being perceived.

"Take to the right and go as far as you can," said Pablo to Vandelles. "When you can advance no farther, utter twice the bark of the coyote; that will be the signal for me to run to Luke. Then, hide yourself in the grass and wait. When the Indians come around the fire, run to the horses. If you reach the mustangs without discovery (as perhaps you may in the high grass), shout three times when you are all mounted. Go, and may Heaven watch over you. Make a turn as large as possible, for the undulation of the grass may betray you."

Vandelles, Shanty, Bertha and Rosina went off following Benito, who was charged to conduct them.

Cradle and Pablo remained concealed in the shadow of the sierra.

An hour, each minute seeming a day passed slowly on.

Not a sound disturbed the silence of the valley.

Finally, three barks resounded from the other side of the Indian encampment.

"Heaven be thanked, they are saved!" muttered Pablo. "Now for Luke."

"Hark!" whispered Cradle.

A light sound came from the rock.

"They are mounting the ladder and rope."

"No, the Indians of the other valley have entered the cave," said Pablo.

"They have seen the Apaches and doubtless fear an attack. I have an idea; go to the left; then run to Luke as soon as I fire a pistol-shot."

At the same instant, the Indian sentinels gave a cry of alarm and rushed to the thicket.

The savages had heard the precipitate gallop of the mustangs bearing away Steel-arm's companions.

In less than a minute, all the camp were on foot.

This instant had sufficed for Pablo to cut some handfuls of dry grass.

He set this on fire and shot off two barrels of his revolver.

Then throwing himself flat upon the ground in the high grass, he joined Cradle at the moment when the latter was about to rush towards Luke.

While a portion of the Indians ran after the mustangs, the others, their attention being attracted to the mountain by the two shots and the burning grass, rushed towards the opening, which was revealed by the flame.

Habituated to the stratagems of Indians, the Apaches imagined that the stampede of the horses was a trick to draw off their attention from the rock.

The ladder and ropes, which swung to and fro, proved clearly indeed that enemies were hidden in that part of the mountain.

Pablo and Cradle profited by this period of tumult to rush to Luke, of whom the savages were not thinking.

The thongs which bound the poor lad were cut, and Pablo, taking him in his arms, began to run, preceded by Cradle.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DEATH OF LUKE.

THE gambusino made the signal agreed with Benito, who instantly replied and ran to his friends with two horses beside his own.

These animals, who were greatly terrified at the presence of the whites, had no bridles upon them, but Pablo had foreseen all.

Every miner had in his belt a bridle which was hastily passed into the mustangs' mouths.

Before this operation, which was difficult from the horses' resistance, was completely terminated, a dozen Indians rushed upon the miners.

"Benito," cried Pablo, "take Luke before you and go."

While the capataz hastened to obey, Cradle and Steel-arm discharged their revolvers upon the savages.

Five Indians fell to the ground.

One of them, though mortally wounded, clutched Pablo by the legs and tried to overthrow him.

Steel-arm struck him upon the head with the butt of his revolver, and mounted a horse.

"Forward!" cried Pablo, seeing that his comrades were ready.

Cradle discharged his revolver and his pistols upon those who tried to stop them, and the mustangs went off at a gallop.

One Indian had caught hold of the croup of Pablo's saddle, but the gambusino pulled him off and he fell head-foremost to the earth.

Some savages rushed after them, but though they were swift they could not come up to the horses.

Being occupied in protecting his comrades, Pablo had not bridled his own horse, but mastered him only by the action of his legs.

He placed the bridle in the mustang's mouth, and passed before his two friends.

The horses of the latter still struggled with their riders, whom they would not recognize by odor, movements, or voice.

He soon reached Benito, whose course was retarded by the double burden; then three horsemen galloped together.

"How is Luke?" inquired Pablo.

"I think he has lost his senses," replied Benito. "He may even be dead."

"Give him to me," said Steel-arm; "your horse is tired. Each of us will take him in turn."

"Well?" asked Cradle of the gambusino, as the latter placed Luke before him and pressed his hand to the young man's heart.

"He lives," replied Pablo in a voice so sad that it chilled the others to the hearts.

At the first stream they encountered, Pablo dismounted and threw some water upon Luke, who returned to consciousness.

"How do you feel Luke?" asked the Californian.

"I am dying," rejoined he with resignation; "where are the others?"

"They are all before us."

"Let us reach them," cried Luke, "I wish not to die here."

Pablo understood what was passing in the young man's mind: he wished again to see Rosina.

"To horse!" cried he.

As the miners resumed their course, they heard the noise of five or six horses coming from the direction of the cave.

"Some mustangs escaped us," said Benito, "and the cursed redskins have found them."

"Gallop," said Steel-arm; "we are not strong enough to resist them."

At five o'clock in the morning, as the sun appeared in the horizon, the miners found themselves near the corral.

"Stop an instant," said Steel-arm, whose horse stumbled under its double load, for he had not decided to transfer Luke to the others.

"What for?" inquired Cradle.

"Let us see if the Indians pursue us before we join our friends."

Ten minutes passed before the Indians



numbering seven, appeared bent over their wooden saddles.

They were armed with tomahawks or machetes, a bow and five or six arrows.

Not perceiving the white men, who were concealed in the wood, they continued to press on their mustangs.

When they were within forty paces of him, Pablo commanded them to fire.

One of the Indians fell.

The others threw themselves on the side of their horses, being evidently wounded.

The fourth was shot, but the horse was running away, when Pablo fired at it, which fell on its knees, rose, bounded and upset its master, and finally rolled to the ground with its rider near by—both dead.

During this time, the three others came upon the miners with furious cries.

Cradle coolly let one approach within ten paces of him and then shot two barrels of his revolver into him.

Another, more skilful, made his horse leap as the American aimed at him, and the bullet struck the mustang.

Before Cradle could fire a second shot, the Indian let fly an arrow which hit him on the right cheek just below the eye and glanced from the cheek-bone.

The pain was so acute that for a moment Cradle forgot his position.

Fortunately for him, the savage ruled his horse with difficulty from the wound the latter had received.

As he raised his tomahawk to strike his enemy, Cradle fired a third shot.

At the same instant, Pablo brought down his machete upon the savage.

Receiving at the same time two mortal wounds, the Indian bent to his horse's neck, from which he was soon shaken by the leaps of the ungoverned steed.

The last of the seven Apaches had been lassoed and dispatched by the capataz.

"Quick, to the corral!" cried Pablo. "Take their horses, for they are fresher than ours and their saddles are better than none."

"And our horses?" asked Cradle.

"We must hamstring them," responded Pablo. "If we do not, they will return to the cavern and be used against us by the Indians. Keep the best for Luke."

This cruel, but necessary operation accomplished, the miners hastened to gain the corral.

The three miners lassoed as many mustangs very quickly, and in a half hour the captives were subdued.

In the state of excitement in which were the miners, they felt all their vigor and courage redoubled by the dangerous situation.

While Pablo and Benito gave drink to the wild horses, Cradle had washed Kermain's wounds.

In about five minutes time, the miners resumed the route followed by their friends some hours before.

At eight o'clock or thereabouts in the morning, they came in sight of the river of which Steel-arm had spoken to Vandelles.

"Before an hour we will rejoin our friends," said Pablo. "I see by the footprints that their horses are tired. One has even fallen, there, in that hole. They are not far off."

Half an hour after, in fact, the miners reached Vandelles, Shanty, Bertha and Rosina, who awaited them on the banks of the river, indicated by Steel-arm.

This river, known under the name of Horses River, from the number of wild horses met with in its neighborhood, was about a quarter of a league in width in this place.

In the middle rose a rock covered with trees and wild plants.

The meeting would have been the most joyful, was it not for the frightful state of poor Luke.

The latter had refused to stop, and, though breathing painfully, had lost consciousness.

While Bertha and Rosina pressed around him, Pablo questioned Shanty.

"What has become of the mustangs you were to drive before you?" inquired Steel-arm.

"They almost all escaped us."

"That is bad, for they will return to the Indians."

"I know it, Don Pablo, but I did my best. I kept them together till we reached the great clearing, which you had to cross two hours ago, when the cursed animals scattered in spite of all my efforts."

"What are we to do now?" asked Benito, who, though he had ended by submitting to the gambusino's orders continued to hate him more than ever.

"I think within two miles of here are swamps impossible to be crossed."

"Then we must pass the river here," said Benito.

"Give me the least fatigued horse," said Pablo. "I will go to the place where I think the marsh and swamps are situated. While waiting for my return, begin the preparations for a raft if you have strength."

Though much wearied the miners began cutting wood to form the raft.

Bertha and Rosina sought to alleviate Luke's cruel suffering.

The shooting pains from his smarting wounds would often quiver his whole person.

"Poor Luke! it was to save us that you are thus," cried Rosina weeping.

"Any one would do as I have done," replied the young man. Then the fever heating his brow, he painfully pressed it with his hand and said: "How thirsty I am!"

Rosina made an attempt to go for water, but he retained her.

"Do not leave me," said he, "I may die when you are away."

Bertha returned with Shanty, who carried water in his hat, at the bottom of which were some large leaves.

Luke thanked him and drank it with large draughts.

The sudden cold brought on delirium, during which Luke mistook Shanty for an Indian, then for Steel-arm.

By the time Pablo returned, a glimmer of reason had come to him and he recognized the gambusino, whom he thanked for all the kindness which he had done for him.

Steel-arm tried to see in what manner his share of gold should be disposed of.

But Luke Kermain became again delirious and raved about Indians, gold, Rosina, all his comrades, begging for mercy, giving away his gold to each of his comrades, and many other acts of insanity.

Finally, at the end of a quarter of an hour of fearful agony, the unfortunate young man expired in the arms of Rosina.

Pablo perceived his death the first.

He placed his hand upon Luke's heart and said in a deeply moved tone:

"Luke is dead, my friends. May our acts be as faithful as his last."

Rosina's child, which Luke had more than any one petted, wept at seeing the others so solemn and silent, and clung to the young man's body till its mother was forced to apply strength to pull her away.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PABLO A PRISONER.

"We must dig a grave," said Shanty.

"That is impossible at this moment," replied Pablo. "Our time is precious. Finish the raft. We will carry Luke's body, and bury it on the island."

"You have decided to go?" asked Vandelles.

"Yes," replied Steel-arm.

"And the horses?" inquired Benito.

"We must drive them into the swamp," said Vandelles.

"No," said Pablo. "They are indispensable to our flight. Besides the Indians will immediately find them and easily guess what has become of us."

"They can be fastened to the raft, and will swim across."

"The current will drag them away."

"Let us try it though," said Benito, "for, if we find ourselves without horses, we will be worse off than ever."

"Wait," said Pablo, "I will carry a cord to the island. I will take a couple of turns around the nearest tree, and by it we can haul the raft along."

He executed his plan and returned to his companions.

They embarked upon the raft, after which the horses were attached.

To Pablo was reserved the most dangerous task: that of remaining the last to defend the rope against the Indians, if they attempted to cut it before the raft had reached its destination.

The miners had scarcely left the bank, when Steel-arm heard the dry leaves and branches crackle under rapid steps.

"Hasten, the Indians come!" cried he to his friends as he cocked his gun and prepared his revolver, which he held in his teeth.

The miners clung to the cable with all their force to resist the power of the current, which was so strong that almost all the paddles were disabled.

A minute more, and all were useless.

The miners nearly reached the bank, but the raft separated in two or three places as they touched the shore.

During this time, Steel-arm held the Apaches at bay before him.

He successively fired two shots of his rifle, and four of the revolver.

Each ball killed a man.

The Indians stopped a moment.

They numbered twenty, but their arrows could not contend against the Californian's terrible weapons.

The instant he saw his friends had gained the shore, he cut the rope, and threw himself into the water to join them.

All at once, whether his strength had failed, or he had struck some rock or a trunk of a tree, or a cramp had seized him, or whether he was wounded, he struggled in the water like a drowning man, and disappeared in the reeds which grew ten or twelve feet from the island.

The miners uttered a cry of distress, to which the Indians replied by yells of joy.

"Save Pablo!" cried at the same time Bertha, Rosina and Shanty.

"He is dead," responded Benito, "we can do nothing for him."

"Perhaps he will reappear," cried Bertha. "Wait an instant."

"No," said Benito; "three or four minutes have passed since he sunk. His fate is certain, and there is no use of going to help him. The Indians are swimming to us. Think of ourselves, and go."

He rushed to a horse, took his wife and child in his arms, notwithstanding Rosina's resistance, and went off at a gallop.

"Come, Bertha," said Vandelles, trying to drag away the young woman, who, pale, mute and motionless, seemed



struck with stupor. "Come!" repeated he.

She passed her hand over her brow, and looked upon Vandelles as if she had not understood.

Seeing that she still remained motionless, the Frenchman followed Benito's example, who was galloping along the river.

He mounted a horse, took Bertha in his arms, and spurred off at full speed.

Cradle and Shanty remained behind.

"Go," said Shanty, pointing out to the American the horse which was left.

"And you?"

"I remain. Perhaps Steel-arm still lives. I see that the Indians are diving for him. Say to Madam Vandelles that I live if he lives, or I shall die with him."

The two men exchanged a shake of the hand silently, and Cradle galloped away with the full speed of the mustang, which, less burdened than the other horses, soon rejoined his companions.

Shanty concealed himself in a tuft of aquatic plants which covered him to the head with their large leaves, from which he could observe all the actions of the Indians.

The Apaches continued to plunge into the stream to recover the gambusino.

At the end of two or three minutes, one of the Indians sent forth a cry of joy and raised above the water Steel-arm's head.

The other savages came to his aid, and disengaged the Californian's feet, which were entangled in the reeds.

Shanty now understood why Pablo had sunk so speedily. Pablo appeared completely lifeless, his head hanging inertly upon the shoulder of the Indian who bore him.

With the exception of those savages who were crossing the river by swimming, all of them turned and entered the forest.

Shanty remained nearly half an hour without seeing or hearing anything.

At the end of that time, he perceived a canoe, propelled by twelve Indians traversing the river two or three gunshots from him.

In the midst of the rowers, Shanty saw Steel-arm in the stern of the bark.

The canoe soon reached the bank.

Shanty awaited with anxiety as he wished to know in what state Pablo now was.

As well as he could judge from the distance, the gambusino stepped on shore with a firm pace, though he was securely bound.

The Indians leaped upon land with the exception of two of them, who remained in the canoe with Pablo, while the six others followed the trail of the miners.

All the attention of the four on guard was concentrated upon their comrades.

Shanty could approach the gambusino by degrees.

As he was unused to this sort of proceeding, he advanced but slowly and was quite often obliged to make long stoppages.

His intention was to attack the guardians of Steel-arm as soon as the other Indians were more distant.

A hundred paces separated him yet from the captive, when he saw the canoe reappear.

This time it contained fourteen Indians, who were obliged to keep the most complete quiet to preserve the equilibrium of the skiff, destined at most for seven or eight persons.

Shanty sank back into some reeds, and watched the Indians disembark.

Twice again the skiff made the same voyage.

The last time it was less loaded.

The Irishman counted in all thirty-four savages, including the guardians of Steel-arm.

When united, the Indians departed, running in the direction their comrades had before taken.

Soon there remained but two with Steel-arm.

These latter carried their prisoner to the canoe, took the paddles and proceeded on the river along its banks.

During this time, the majority of the band continued to search the ground for traces of the whites; but the canoe was soon lost to view.

In spite of his fatigue, Shanty collected all his forces to follow the skiff.

He did not reach it until night.

It would have been very dangerous to proceed during darkness in this river, which presented each instant trunks of trees and other obstacles upon which a boat would break.

So the Indians stopped and fastened the canoe to a tree on the bank.

One of them landed to collect wood for a fire and to cook their meal.

Exhausted by the rapidity of his course, Shanty was obliged to stop at forty paces from the bark to recover his mind.

When he had rested, he approached by crawling, to the canoe.

His *gamusa* (hunting-shirt) of deer-skin, was marvelously adapted to prevent its being distinguished from the ground.

Notwithstanding all Shanty's precaution, the Indian's acute senses caught the sound of the branches thrust aside by the Irishman's hands.

He uttered a cry of alarm, and rushed to the place where the noise came from.

Shanty saw that stratagems were useless, and he threw himself into the water, his revolver in his teeth, and swam with all his strength to gain the canoe.

The Indian turned and reached it before him.

At the moment when Shanty put his left hand upon the boat, the savage struck at him with his machete, almost severing his wrist, and delivered a blow of his tomahawk which would have cloven his skull, if Steel-arm had not, though he was bound, thrown himself between the Indian's legs, and made him stagger as he aimed the blow at Shanty.

Though his wrist was broken, the latter would not leave go his grasp of the skiff.

He fired a shot from his revolver and slew the young Indian.

A second bullet, more by chance than aim, did justice to the old Apache who fell head downwards on the bank.

But already the savages, attracted by the cries of their companions, and by the reports of the two shots, ran with all haste to the canoe.

Shanty hurriedly cut Pablo's bonds.

"Cut the rope and take the paddles," said he quickly.

"I cannot make a movement," replied Pablo. "The Indians bound me so tightly that my arms and hands are like those of a corpse."

The Irishman, who had fallen into the bottom of the canoe, half raised himself upon his knees and began to cut the rope.

The Indians were already within pistol-shot of the two white men.

The rope was cut.

Pablo could not move yet, so Shanty made a desperate attempt to shove off the canoe.

At the same time the Apaches reached the bank.

Some dived into the water, others bent their bows and sent a flight of arrows upon the craft.

"See those two Indians on the right," said Shanty. "Take care, Pablo; one of them has his hand on the canoe."

Pablo by a desperate effort turned to the savage and smashed his fingers with his hands.

But five or six enemies swam on each side of the canoe.

Electrified by the imminence of the danger, Pablo clutched the paddles, and by the end of two or three minutes, he had recovered the use of his limbs, and, under his robust arms, the canoe bounded rapidly over the water.

"Where are our friends?" asked he of Shanty.

"I think they followed the bank of the river," replied the Irishman.

Notwithstanding all the dangers which navigating the stream by night, presented, Steel-arm persevered.

The task he had undertaken was the more difficult as the canoe was made for four rowers at the least, and he alone could manage it, as Shanty with his broken wrist was incapable of rendering much service to his companion.

Many times when the canoe encountered snags, rocks, sunken trees and other dangers, it required all of Pablo's spirit and skill to avoid them without danger to the craft.

## CHAPTER X.

### FREE OF THE APACHES.

WHEN Cradle reached his companions he was overwhelmed with inquiries upon the fate of Steel-arm and Shanty.

He recounted his parting with Shanty, and the latter's determination to remain and save Pablo, or to die with him.

"Noble man!" murmured Bertha.

"On, we must not stop," said Vandelles; "every minute is precious."

"So, you would leave to perish, him to whom you owe all?" said Bertha, indignantly.

"We cannot do otherwise," replied Benito. "If he is dead or a prisoner, our presence will not benefit him. We should fall a few more victims to the redskins."

"Besides," added Vandelles, "Pablo himself recommended us to go on without him, to fly from the danger he was exposed to. Alone, he could act better."

"He did right, indeed, in not counting upon you," said Bertha bitterly.

"Cease," interrupted Vandelles, "your despair too well reveals what was the connection between you and Pablo."

"It was before accepting his gift, that you should have thought of that," replied the young woman, mad with inquietude and anguish.

"Oh! you desire more than I that he should be of this world," said Vandelles. "When you and my treasure are in safety I shall go in the search of Steel-arm. Please heaven, I may recover him. We are quits then, and we shall have another account to settle."

A similar scene, but still more excited, passed between Rosina and Benito.

Rosina, since Luke's death, seemed to have forgotten her love for Steel-arm, whom she was much less occupied with since a few days.

But the heroic devotion of the gambusino, and the terrible fate which menaced him, had, in an instant, revived all the passions smouldering at the bottom of the Spaniard's heart.

Furious at Benito's cowardice, she replied to the half-breed with stinging reproaches, which made the capataz leap with anger and jealousy.

As for Cradle, he galloped in advance and meddled in no degree with these conjugal quarrels.

In reality, the three miners were less to be blamed than would be thought of at first.

As Vandelles had said, their presence before the island would have exposed them to certain death without its being of the least advantage to Steel-arm.



The latter besides, had escaped so many dangers, that it was not very unkind to believe that he would again escape the death seeming to menace him.

Vandelles kept repeating this to himself to justify his conduct to himself, but, for all that, in the depths of his heart, he was not satisfied with himself.

Had it not been for his jealousy, he would have turned back and joined Paddy Shanty, whose gallant conduct appeared a reproach to him.

The party galloped on all night.

However, they were forced to rein in suddenly.

A steep bluff rose at the very brink of the river, and running along a great way, seemed to completely bar their passage.

They fancied, at first blush, that it was not impossible for them to climb the elevation, but it was not long before they discovered the impossibility of this.

Like the greater part of the volcanic rocks of this section, the face and side of the elevated ground was sheer up and down, and offered no chance of ascension, even to the most active and fearless man on foot.

Benito started his horse at full speed, and dashed from the stream in a parallel line, thus riding along the foot of the bluff.

Meanwhile, Cradle and Vandelles dismounted and searched around to find some defile or opening of any sort that would allow them to begin an ascent.

At the end of a half-hour's fruitless search, they saw Benito on the return.

He had been no more lucky than they.

The mountain ran along beyond view.

It even described a kind of arc of a circle which imprisoned the miners in a ring not to be overstepped.

There were but two courses before them.

To follow the line of the obstacle, which would throw the party into the hands of the redskins, who must be aware of this formation of the land, and would naturally take measures to intercept their enemies; or, to cross the river, which was at this place exceedingly broad, and running with frightful swiftness.

As the reader will acknowledge, both of these methods were almost impracticable.

Supposing even, which was not in the least probable, that a raft could stem the current, there was neither wood nor rope, nor, especially, the necessary time for one to be constructed, however, slight and incomplete it might be.

"Heaven is against us," cried Vandelles in his rage. "We are lost. There is nothing for us to do but to wait for death, or rather we will have to kill ourselves to escape the tortures which those red devils have got in store for us."

His wife said never a word.

Since she had lost the hope of ever again seeing Pablo, everything else had become indifferent to her.

Reclining on the ground, her head buried in her hands, she dwelt without motion and in silence, only asking heaven to send her as soon as possible to meet once more him she loved.

Rosina, only connected with life by her child, was praying for the poor little creature to be saved, which she covered with tears and kisses.

Benito, giving himself up to his wild and unrestrained nature, was foaming with anger.

Now he was blaspheming all the saints in the calendar, anon he was promising them the richest of offerings.

On account of that inborn creed which men have to shift their misfortune on somebody's shoulders, the capataz selected Vandelles, and bitterly reproached him for being so obstinate in following the line of the river.

Vandelles was not the kind of man to take this coolly.

A quarrel, the twentieth at least in a month, thereupon would have broke out between the two, each as violent as the other, had not Cradle called his companions.

"Hark!" cried he.

"What is it?"

"A boat is coming."

The gold-hunters hastened to break off their angry colloquy and concealed themselves in the brushwood.

The sound approached.

It was easy to tell it was the motion of a paddle in the water.

"An Indian canoe," shouted Vandelles, Benito and Cradle, as the peculiar sharp prow of a boat made its appearance around a bend of the stream.

Presently the canoe shot swiftly to within half a pistol shot of the shore.

They heard the three coyote barks by means of which Pablo had been accustomed to announce his presence whenever he returned at night to the gold seekers' camp.

"Steel-arm!" exclaimed Bertha.

"Pablo!" was Rosina's cry.

"It cannot be!" said Benito.

"It is Steel-arm, I tell you," resumed Bertha. "Answer his signal."

"If they are Indians," remonstrated the capataz, "we will be in a pretty mess."

"And its very likely they are the red men," observed Vandelles.

"No; I recognized the signal as Don Pablo's," said Rosina.

"The Indians may have imitated it," returned Vandelles.

"It is Pablo, I am certain," cried Bertha.

Yielding to the great joy which overflowed her heart, she lifted up her voice to call her lover.

"Hush!" said Vandelles laying his finger on her lips.

The splash of the paddle and the ripple of the water under the bow of the pirogue, which had passed, denoted the boat was returning.

The signal was heard again.

This time Vandelles replied.

In a couple of minutes the canoe ran up to the bank.

A man jumped on land.

It was Steel-arm.

When he came among his friends, he was greeted with transports of joy.

Notwithstanding their jealousy, Vandelles and Benito did not venture to prevent their wives from pressing the hand of the brave, and devoted man who had once more saved their life and honor.

"My well-beloved Pablo," murmured Bertha in the gambusino's ear, as she leant over to him.

Rosina took his hand affectionately, but with that feeling of sadness and discouragement which she showed now to everybody.

Steel-arm was overwhelmed with inquiries to learn how he had contrived to escape the Indians, but there was no time given for him to reply.

"The Apaches!" shouted Shanty suddenly, whose cheek an arrow had scratched.

For a moment all were terror stricken.

Then Steel-arm shouted:

"Quick, to the canoe!"

And, catching up Mrs. Vandelles, he carried her to the boat.

With a bound, he alighted in the craft, which a couple of red men were about shoving off.

But Benito had outstripped the gambusino.

At the moment when the latter put his foot on the wood, one of the savages fell into the water, where the second was sent in an instant to join him, with the slash of a bowie

Pablo had only now to catch up the paddle to bring back the dug-out to the bank.

The rest hastened to embark.

Other Indians were hurrying out of the bushes.

Then, Vandelles, Cradle, Shanty and Benito took each a paddle, while Steel-arm used a fifth paddle at the stern to steer the craft.

Before the little deep laden perogue had got much headway, several of the pursuers, to the number of six or seven, the best mounted and youngest, leaped their horses into the river.

But the sudden chill of the water coming upon the hot, steaming horses took away their breath for a second.

A couple of the riders turned round, and, by directing their steeds diagonally, managed to reach the bank, up which they scrambled.

The others kept on after the canoe.

Shanty quietly picked them off with his revolver, and those of the pursuers who were able to do so, endeavored to regain the shore.

The others, dragged—lifeless—by their hands, which in dying had clutched their horses' harness, were swept away by the current with their beasts, which struggled frantically.

The canoe was speedily out of gunshot.

## CHAPTER XI.

### HORSE-THIEVES

To return to the Indians.

As Steel-arm had guessed, the party which sought to force an entrance through the rear of the cavern were those savages called the horse thieves.

The others, in front, were the warlike Apaches.

While the half dozen of the latter pursued the gold-hunters on the few mustangs which were not stampeded, and met the ill-success detailed, the others, attracted towards the opening of the cave by the shots of the revolver, hastened thitherward.

As we have said, employing all kinds of tricks themselves, the Indians believed this but a cunning ruse.

Instantly, by order of the leader of the party, a young chief evidently for the first time on the war-path as a superior—the fires were put out, and nothing was to be seen in the darkness but the scattered sparks and small streaks of smoke spirally mounting.

Meanwhile, the horse-thieves had rushed through the cavern to the very brink of the opening, where they had a sight of the Apaches just before the fires were extinguished.

Suspecting that the gold-seekers had fallen into the hands of the Apaches, and swayed by a feeling of thwarted greed and a desire for revenge on those who had robbed them, the horse-thieves held a consultation.

The Apaches stole along towards the cave, under cover and were invisible, helped in that by the gloom.

An hour or so passed away in the deepest stillness.

This hour, the horse-thieves employed in searching the cavern for gold, we need not say this was unsuccessful.

The Apaches spent the time in preparing all things for an assault.

They had come to the conclusion that one or two of the gold-hunters alone had stampeded their horses, and that the rest, with the fruits of their mining, were still in the cave.

They were scattered about, some three-score tired warriors, with scalping-knife and tomahawk in belt, bow and quiver, lance and gun.

Prostrate in the tall grass, they were hidden, and patiently waiting.



At last, the Apache chief determined that he would attack.

Twenty men were to try and reach the opening as best they might, while their friends would keep the opening clear, and prevent any attempt to repulse them.

So said, so done.

Half a dozen of the Apaches slowly climbed up the ladder, while the rest sought for foot-hold in the crevices of the rock.

When half way up, the unavoidable shaking of the ladder betrayed them.

One of the horse-thieves reached forward to sever the fastening.

A couple of shots rang out from the Apaches, and the horse-thief pitched headlong from the opening, his blood in falling spattering those on the ladder.

Another appeared, but he, too, fell.

So on till four had been shot, no more came.

The Apaches had nearly reached the opening.

Let us see why the horse-thieves gave over the attempt to repel the assailants, and leave the Apaches in wonderment at those they had killed being red men instead of whites.

Four of the Indians in the cave had fallen as we have said.

This showed them that some other plan had to be adopted.

They tied knives to the end of lance-poles and tried to cut the ladder, but it was too clumsy a way, and had to be given up, after one knife—which had been faintly seen shining by the keen-sighted Apaches below—had been shivered by a ball.

There was left of those besieged in the cavern (if the term "besieged" can be applied to them, when they had the opening behind the grotto to escape through, a proceeding which nothing but their pride now kept them from), there was left, we say, twelve men.

Maddened at the loss of their friends, and the gold, they thought only of revenge.

While a couple were watching, in those excavations Pablo had dug for shelter, that the besiegers did not enter, the remainder of the horse-thieves were assembled in a widening of the cavern.

Here, shielded by a turn of the rock, while the smoke escaped through innumerable fissures, burnt a bright *pois de sauche* fire.

Crouched around it were the other Indians.

Two or three were old men, of villainous, greasy physiognomies, who probably knew a little of the depredations committed on poor miners.

They were the leaders of the little band.

The others varied in age, but not in prepossessing appearance.

Their weapons were knives, tomahawks, bows and spears, with here and there a club, garnished with teeth of some wild animal.

"My sons," said the eldest of the men, "Light of Hand has gone. *El Cuchille* (the knife) is singing his death song on the way to the blessed hunting-grounds. Two-Knives has fallen with Scorching Sun, beneath the bullet of an Apache dog."

The auditors gave a groan.

"Long ago," resumed the old man, "we were a powerful tribe. Now, so few of number that our handful here will be missed from our remnant. Shall we return to the Rio Mestena, to the huts of our friends, and hang our heads when they ask where has gone Light of Hand, where *El Cuchille*, where Two Knives, where Scorching Sun?"

"Shall we leave them to bleach at this spot, while their scalps smoke at the tentpole of an Apache lodge? or away

at the saddle-bow of an Apache warrior's horse?"

Nothing but the prescribed courtesy which forbids the orator being interrupted prevented a vehement "No!" breaking forth from the circle.

"No," said the speaker resuming, "rather will we die, dearly selling our war-locks!"

A hum of approval went the round.

"It takes too long," proceeded the old man, "for one to cut the ladder, while exposed to the shots. I propose that one of us, chosen by fate, shall do the only possible act to rid us of this assault. Let us select the man."

Of all the methods by which this drawing could be accomplished, that of the *wishanes* was the favorite.

The *wishanes* are little bones of deer or other animals, generally used by many tribes for a sort of dice.

(We must acknowledge that, although we have many times seen the red men playing games with them, we never could see into their combinations. It is like Chinese music, they understand it, but outsiders cannot.)

A strange scene that was of the group, playing for a decision on death, for it was only a question of the "order of going," for all were resolved to die.

The fire light flickered and glistened from the crystals and stalactites of the grotto, reflected in golden rays, and silver, and deep red, and opal; for there were veins of metals and pebbles like precious stones.

The copper faces glowed as if burnished.

The decision took some time, as each one defeated in the game had to play against the next.

The last two were the fated ones, a sort of supplementary the second being, in case of the first failing.

The chosen one was an active young redskin, who bore his ill-luck impassibly.

The course was to set fire to a branch of pine twigs, and running hastily, as well to fan the flame as to reduce the chances of being shot, to place the bundle right upon the ladder, which would thus be quickly weakened and would break under the weight upon it.

The Indian, igniting the bundle, which burnt furiously, suddenly turned the angle, and hastened to the spot, waving the fire about to prevent his being a mark.

The abruptness of his appearance was what saved him.

He did not arrive a jot too soon.

Already the plume of the first Apache was nodding nearly even with the brink of the aperture.

To set down the fire right on the ladder and its guys, to kick several of the incandescent coals upon the approaching Apaches, was all the devoted redskin had time to do.

A half dozen rifles cracked.

The horse-thief fell, and, writhing in his agony, he dragged himself to the edge, and, whether intentionally or not, he fell like a novel projectile on an Indian who had toilsomely clambered up the rock.

Both fell to the ground, one dead before he struck, and the other dying speedily.

Meanwhile, the foremost Apache—on whose head had fallen the coals, where they set fire to his greasy hair—howling with pain, forgot his position, threw up his arms, and this making him lose his balance, he, too, was dashed to the rocks below.

His comrades, still unaware of the true meaning of the fire, continued to ascend.

The foremost had reached the top by an inch or so, his hand was already lifted

to grasp the rock, when one side of the ladder gave way.

For the briefest possible space of time, the ladder swung, but then, the jerk breaking the scorched rope, the whole descended like a snake entwined around as many men.

In a mass all fell, and from it crawled a couple of maimed forms.

All the others were dead.

A wail of horror went up from the Apaches, for men of note among them had fallen in this attempt.

A whoop of joy came from the cavern.

The horse-thieves were exulting over their success.

There was no retaining the Apaches now.

Headed by their young chief, burning to avenge their loss, in an inconceivably short space of time, the whole body reached the opening of the cave.

They climbed by the plants, by rocky fissures, by catching one another's belts, and only a few received falls and bruises.

For some time, the fight went on in the darkness.

Shot after shot was exchanged.

At length, the last of the horse-thieves had fallen, and an Apache wore his dearly purchased scalp.

No way glutted by the slaughter, the victors now thought of the gold-hunters.

Notwithstanding the start the latter were likely to have, they determined to pursue them.

They fancied the horse thieves to be allies of the whites.

We have seen how they cut off Pablo and how they all but captured the little party.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CAMP OF THE INDIANS.

THE Apaches who had been foiled in their rush upon the gold-seekers at the river's bank, held a hasty council.

At the end of it, they turned and dashed off inland.

Horse River is very winding, full of bends, which make a voyage by water very tedious.

The savage inhabitants of the country were well aware of this.

The Apaches, riders of the utmost skill, went on at a steady, fast pace with slackened rein, to reach a spot where the river narrowed in consequence of an island dividing the channel.

They ate parched corn and dried beef in the saddle.

Let us accompany them, leaving Steel-arm and his companions to toilsomely make their way in the frail bark.

The savages at last drew bridle at the lovely spot which goes by the name of the Beaver Bend, probably from the island beforementioned, looking at a distance and from the ground level as if it was a dam across the stream.

On one side of the island ran the water, over so many rocks and half-sunken trees that navigation was very nearly impossible.

The other portion of the stream rolled swiftly along, uninterrupted.

From this place, the sweep of the river could be commanded, and there was no likelihood of any craft eluding the view of the sentries now stationed along the banks.

The Apaches built fires, picketted their horses, and completed the usual labors of encamping.

This done, and, as we have not omitted to say, the look-outs posted, others crouched, reclined or squatted about the fires.

Nearly twenty, the best workmen, were busy in making canoes of buffalo hides stretched on frames. They were



easy to manufacture, and, even if not used, not much time was wasted on them.

Some cleaned their weapons or sharpened them; others renewed their war-paint; while others again were listening to an old man, a sort of secondary leader.

This old man was distinguished from the others by one thing.

In his girdle was thrust a naked knife, the haft of which was black horn, while the entire blade was gilt rudely and heavily.

The story he was relating having to do with this rather extraordinary weapon, we may be allowed to transcribe it in our own words.

Along the chain of mountains from the Great Salt Lake to Sonora, as follows is related the Legend of the Golden Daggers.

Towards the close of the last century, there was a village of Apaches of the Jicarilla tribe situated on the head waters of the Colorado.

Whatever the cause of difference between them and their red brothers, which had made them settle so far to the west, the fact is that here they were.

Their chief was a famed warrior called by his tribe *Aganiz* (the Wood Eagle).

New Navarre had then for viceroy the Duke of Medina Sidonia.

The Jicarillas guarded his frontier against incursions of even other red men.

They styled the viceroy their white father.

Aganiz had smoked the pipe of peace in the town of San Diego.

In this place was the viceroy's palace.

One day, some Spanish soldiers out hunting chased some horses of the Jicarillas.

The latter sent two deputies to ask justice of the viceroy.

The Apaches are a haughty race.

Their representatives spoke loftily.

The duke, offended at what he called impudence, had them scourged with rods.

They went off sullenly, their soaked blankets on their bleeding backs.

When this was known in the village, the Wood Eagle had a large fire built on a lofty peak.

By the following night, two hundred Apaches were assembled round the ashes of that beacon.

A council was held.

The viceroy's death was determined upon.

The chief himself was designated by fate to carry out this decree.

Aganiz stood up.

He drew his tomahawk from his belt, and flung it into the fire.

"From the Spaniard came this axe-head of steel," said he.

He snapped his bowstring and laid his quiver on the coals.

"The string of my bow and the points of my arrows were gifts of the Spaniards," said he.

He dug a hole in the earth, and there buried his knife and machete, saying:

"The Sachem's consulted."

At last they all cried:

"Our father must die! we must have his scalp!"

Aganiz buried his pipe beside his knife and machete.

"It was he who gave me my calumet," he said.

But the chiefs still wished him to kill.

So the chief took all the gold he owned and went down on the plain.

He went along until he came to a Spanish settlement.

He handed the blacksmith the grains of gold, and bade him forge him a dagger of the metal.

This done, he went to San Diego.

The viceroy gave him an audience.

Aganiz slew the duke with the golden dagger, scalped him, and contrived to escape from the palace and town.

The Spaniards gave the Jicarillas—whom they henceforward hunted like wild beasts, the name of *Cuchillos de Oro*.

The Apaches now wear the name with pride.

In the year 1846, a short time after the surrender of California by Mexico, half a dozen of British conscripts, escaping from Botany Bay, crossed the Pacific in a frail craft and landed on the golden coast.

They had additions to their ranks and gradually descended southward.

They were one night surprised by the Golden Daggers, and lost some of their men and the greater part of their tools and plunder.

They swore revenge on the Indians, and aided by some eastern diggers whom they met, the whole party pursued the Apaches.

Coming up with them in a canon, they fell upon them and made fearful havoc of the redskins.

The Golden Daggers lost all of their number except two or three.

Of this little remnant the Apache whom we are speaking of was one.

At dawn, as the sky above the towering trees began to brighten, the sentinel whose watch was farthest up the stream, noticed a strange movement in the bushes which straggled along on a spot which jutted into the water.

He kept his eyes on the spot, and, being an experienced warrior, who did not wish to alarm his friends for a trifle, he kept his rifle at half-cock.

The bushes shook more visibly.

Soon, the face of a man undoubtedly, appeared between the twigs of a wide-branching shrub, and the eyes took a bearing along the bank.

The sentinel had stepped under cover.

But the white man perceived the other Indians walking about slowly, or leaning on their long lances.

He evidently had learned all he wanted, for his face was instantly withdrawn.

The sentinel who had discovered him, for a second held a debate with himself as to his course.

Then, fearing that the white man might escape before his alarm aroused the camp, the Apache stole in a bent attitude after the white man.

The moment he passed the spit of land, on the other side of which was a cove, the mystery was explained.

A canoe was noiselessly being propelled up stream close to the overhanging shore, by one man.

The Apache recognized the boat as belonging to the fugitives, and felt confident that the latter were only a short distance before them.

Burning to distinguish himself, the Indian determined to proceed, and spy out all the facts concerning the gold-diggers.

So he leaned his lance up against the bushes, and stole into the thicket.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WHITES.

INDEED those who were under the guardianship of Pablo were encamped but a little way from the Apaches.

The men had paddled full half of the night, but were much retarded by snags in the stream, and by many sub-aqueous creepers which were stretched in the water like large nets.

Thanks to Steel-arm's strength of hand and skill as a pioneer, the dangers were avoided.

Once in a while, when passing over a spot apparently free of encumbrance, the

motion of the paddles would cause to rise some submerged tree.

Then—for the canoe would be entangled in the boughs—one of the party would have to get upon the slimy trunk, and there, knee-deep in water, work the light craft free.

Add to all this, the constant look-out that had to be kept up, the weariness of such incessant labor, the appetite caused by so much exercise, and no one should wonder that at midnight the general voice should be for a stop.

Steel-arm alone opposed it from a consciousness of such being a necessary course.

Cradle was half of his way of thinking, while Shanty was fully on Pablo's side.

"Let us put it to the vote," said Vandelles at length.

Pablo remonstrated against even that pause.

Vandelles, however, was supported in this.

So, the pirogue was shot laterally towards the bank, and there overshadowed by the vegetation so luxuriant, the council was held.

Silence reigned almost supreme.

The only sound, apart from their low voices, that the gold-seekers heard was a rustle in the tree tops, the scream of some bird of prey, or, at times, a groan.

(This groan, for full till you become accustomed to it, is made by a species of sun-fish.)

The women took of course no part in the deliberation.

Rosina and Bertha were seated together, for the night on the river was quite cool.

"This is all folly," cried Vandelles, "there's no likelihood at all, of the Indians being in our pursuit after the last show we gave them of our quality."

"That's so," chimed in Cradle, "we were a little too many for them there. How pretty that fellow with the black feather was dragged down stream with his nag. Ha, ha, ha!"

"But," said Steel-arm, "depend upon it, the very reason of our so foiling them is why I fear that they are on our track."

The speaker best knew how indefatigable the red men are, especially in such a case.

Besides revenge, there was the gold of the party in prospect.

To wipe out their defeat, to soothe their smarting honor, and to be paid (as it were) for so doing, was not what an Indian would miss.

"It cannot be," observed Benito, "there was no material for them to build boats."

"Nor time," added Cradle.

"They will roll logs into the river and come down that way after us," said Benito, "if no other means are at hand."

"If the redskins were such fools," said Vandelles laughing, "we would not be such fools as to let them catch up to us, tired as we are."

"What I mean," returned Steel-arm, "is, that the Apaches are so unforgiving that they will do anything to overtake us."

"That may very well be," said Vandelles, "but is there anything they can do?"

"May they not ride so as to cut us off," remarked Bertha gently.

"You're right, Mrs. Vandelles," cried Cradle, smiting his thigh, "ten ounces to one that the red devils will be down on the bank somewhere, ready to pop at us."

This decided the speaker to join Vandelles' side of the question.

He, Vandelles, and Benito now demanded instant resumption of the paddling, quite as loudly as, before this idea of Bertha, they had wished for a stop.



Upon this, Pablo only too gladly yielding, the little bark dashed out into the open once again.

They went now, as far as it was possible, in the middle of the river, keeping thus equi-distant from either bank to escape bullets or arrows from them, in case Bertha's words should turn out a fore-warning.

Now that this thought weighed upon their minds, it was not strange that one or another, dropping his paddle, caught up his rifle and hurriedly leveled it at some spot at the water's edge where a shaking bush told of life, probably an animal coming down to drink.

This sudden act, although a kind of intimation of such intention was given to one's partner, had the result of making the canoe, deprived so unexpectedly of half the propelling force on one side, swerve from its course and turn around in a more or less degree.

This not only delayed the boat, but often, the current running swiftly, it was swept against obstacles which would otherwise have been avoided.

Once, Cradle fancying he caught sight of a glistening rifle-barrel on the left hand bank, he let fall his paddle, and, in haste to pick off the supposed marksman, half stooped to take up his rifle, all without thinking of cautioning Benito, who managed the opposite stroke to him.

Shanty, with his broken wrist, being on the left side, had the whole force of the current and the other two paddlers against him.

The head of the boat whirled about rapidly.

Cradle was just rising to take aim.

The stern of the canoe, deepest laden, caught the most force of the water.

It was dashed violently against the boughs of a sunken tree, which had been lifted by an eddy caused by the sudden change of the boat.

Cradle, whom the shock threw off his balance, was toppled over the gunwale.

In falling, his rifle fell inside the canoe, where the stock broke a hole through.

For an instant all was confusion.

Cradle had disappeared, being very heavy, what with his gold, his thick boots and clothes.

Rosina, who had seen the water spouting up through the aperture made by the gun, shrieked.

Benito and Vandelles were reeking to and fro.

Shanty, on his knees, so as to be enabled to lean farther out, was feeling with his oar for the gold seeker.

Pablo, in a glance seeing that the canoe was so entangled in the sawyer as to be anchored, so to say, laid down his dripping paddle, and—the stern now being down stream—without loss of time, passed a couple of turns of an end of Benito's lasso around and under the seats, and, holding the other, leaped right out on the spot where Cradle had disappeared.

All this had been done at the same time; that is to say, these different acts had gone on simultaneously although in different parts of the boat.

Suddenly—while Vandelles and Benito were tugging at the slimy, slippery boughs which had risen from the water like the arms of the giant cuttle-fish of the Indian Seas—they felt the canoe gliding in the proper direction right off the boughs of the sawyer, which lay, of course, with the root buried up stream.

It was the weight at the end of the lasso.

Down the river a form was to be seen.

Either the seats had to be torn out (but they held firm), or the lasso break (but that was of stout thongs), or the boat follow the tow—this happened.

In less time than it takes us to relate, Pablo and Cradle (for the gambusio had saved his countryman) were free.

fully on board. Cradle was senseless.

His feet had become entangled in the sawyer, and there he would have died, with only a bubble or so rising to tell the spot, had not Pablo dived so close to him.

The latter was weak, also, for the river had rushed furiously against the two, when they had played a buoy to the canoe.

Now, be the danger what it might, the canoe was paddled in shore.

A fire was soon built, all precautions being employed.

Pablo and Cradle were both in need of sleep, and to beds of dry leaves they soon betook themselves.

Bertha and Rosina slept behind a screen of blankets.

Vandelles kept watch.

Benito and Shanty set to work mending the canoe, through the hole in which had been stuffed the corner of a zarape.

Plenty of bark was at hand, and deer-sinews supplied the ligatures.

This done (and some time was spent in the work, for the darkness imposed upon them by prudence prevented their labor progressing at as great a rate as with light it would have done), Shanty took his turn at sentry duty.

Vandelles and Benito went to rest.

Nothing of interest transpired during Shanty's watch.

There was the usual noises in the forest; the howling and barking of wild beasts, with the screeches of birds.

On the surface of the river would every now and anon appear a fish, like the bluish steel head of a spear, and a wide circle would quickly spread.

A couple of times, the Irishman stepped towards the thicket, where a rustle betrayed life, but the sudden rush away of some object denoted it to be some prowling animal and not a man.

It was nearly morning when Benito awoke.

"How's your hand, Paddy?" inquired he.

It was clear the capataz had had pleasant dreams, for he was quite good humored.

"Better," returned the Irishman.

"All quiet?"

"Not a breath the whole night through, barring a fish laping after a night bug, or a baste of some sort that was smelling round the fire. I wish I could have bagged one or t'other of them, for it's mighty little to eat we have, unless this jerked beef is better than I think it."

"That is true," said Benito, reflecting.

"We haven't the fishing-lines here?"

"No; there was no room for 'em," said the Irishman disconsolately.

Benito looked around.

"Too bad," muttered he. "That dark spot up there must be alive with sunfish."

"But then you have no luck with hook and line. Mr. Benny-to," said Shanty. "Oh, Mr. Cradle is the darling for that. He can draw the salmon out of water as if he fascinated them."

Benito's good-humor seemed to have worked off him. He did not look very much pleased at this compliment to Cradle, it being a sort of back-handed cut at him.

"But, Mr. Benny-to," went on the Irishman, his voice dropping into the tone peculiar to his race, "you're such a neat hand at the line—the leather one, I mean—that you might get into the woods a bit and drop the slip-knot on top of some quail, or turkey, or any kind of birds that are here—heaven knows there's a plenty of 'em. And heaven knows what game you may pick up!"

A kind of prophetic exclamation.

Benito, flattered by the allusion to his skill with the lasso, made no delay in starting.

Perhaps his mouth watered for a good breakfast as much as the Irishman's.

He did not take his rifle, but hung his equally as terrible a weapon at his side.

Too lazy to walk, he chose the canoe.

Shanty and he carried it down to the water, an easy matter, unloaded as it was, and launched it.

The capataz stepped in, shook Paddy's hand, he resumed his round, and paddled as noiselessly as possible down the river.

To make our narrative as brief as possible, we may state (though the reader cannot have failed to have foreseen it) that Benito was the white man whom the Apache sentinel had seen and followed.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### INDIAN AND HALF-BREED.

THE capataz had paddled down stream, skirting the shore, stopping at every point to spy if the coast was clear.

As we have said, he had discovered the Apache camp and its watchers.

Instantly, he had drawn his face back, had pushed through the undergrowth, and made his way to the canoe.

Before jumping into it, he listened attentively.

No unusual sound was to be heard.

So he took to the paddles, and began his backward course.

Against the current, he found it no easy matter, and, had not the boat been so light, it would have been impossible for him to reach his friends and warn them within reasonable time.

Now paddling vigorously to turn a point, where the water rippled loudly and was white with bubbles; now shooting over a placid bay; then, pulling the canoe by grasping creepers; or, at times even, compelled to land, shoulder the canoe and carry it across tongues of land, at the extremity of which the river was too strong for him; thus did Benito progress.

Nearly all the time, a pair of eyes, keen and piercing, were upon him, and the owner of the eyes had the life of the capataz more than twenty times at the end of his rifle.

With moccasined feet, the Apache proceeded along shore with but little sound.

At times, he had to make circuits to clear swampy spots, or the rocky beds of little brooks formed by springs.

Then, again, the spy would be entangled in a jungle, where *lianas*, with blue or pink blossoms, giving out strong odor, seemed to have been worked into a net.

Once, he drew himself up from his stooping attitude, and half drew his machete.

What was apparently a dead twig sprang into life, as by a miracle, and a lithe snake reared half its neck, with its red, glistening tongue playing briskly in its jaws.

But the Indian's movement sufficed to scare it, and it crawled out of sight.

Sometimes, the Apache would utter an "Ugh!" of disgust, as his face broke down a web, and as the bloated spinner, as big as a walnut, fell upon his cheek or breast.

It so chanced that the obstacles against which both the spy and the espied had to struggle, were so nearly equal in their retarding properties that the two men were nearly abreast.

There was a stretch of the shore for about twenty yards along the edge of a widening of the stream. There was a line more or less thick, of tangle-weed and bushes, growing to nearly the height of one's breast.

Benito was pushing directly across the opening to make the opposite point,



when a slight sound made him turn his head quickly landward.

The sound was the snap of a broken twig.

A twig, indeed, which was under the step of the Apache, had thus betrayed him.

He was pretty nearly past the open space, and stooping, too, but he fancied that at least his plumed head had been seen.

Immediately, not losing his presence of mind, he imitated the gobble of a wild turkey.

In fact, Benito had just caught a fleeting glimpse of the feathers adorning the savage's scalp.

The call of the bird, well done, and extremely likely to deceive the best woodsman, robbed him of any suspicions he might have had.

It also reminded him of the original purpose of his setting out.

He ran up to the bank, fastened the canoe and leaped ashore.

Taking a long look to fasten on the spot where the turkey was likely to have roosted, Benito pushed into the thicket, coiling his lasso as he went.

He took every precaution, of course, as to stillness.

Meanwhile, the Indian—who was not such a wizard as to guess the scarcity of provisions in the camp of the whites—stood in astonishment at the sudden cessation of the sound—slight though it had been—of Benito's paddling.

The deepest stillness was in the wood.

There is nothing weighs so much upon man as the unknown.

The Apache, not liking the idea of groping through the wood, began to make his way towards the place where Benito's canoe was moored.

During this decision of his, Benito—hearing no longer anything of his supposed turkey, a very suspicious fact, for the bird could have no reason for remaining silent—began to think he had committed a great blunder, and whether he had done right or not, determined to get to the camp as soon as he could.

This two-fold change in the designs of the men had resulted in placing them thus: Benito was preceded by the Apache, both moving to the same point.

Benito, however, went straight forward till he came to the line of his destination, when he turned that way; the Indian went along the water's edge; their lines formed the sides of an obtuse angle, the canoe at the apex.

Just as Benito mounted some rising ground, which overlooked the cove and its surroundings, he caught sight of the Indian stealing along some twenty yards from him.

He instantly squatted down, so that the discovery should not be reciprocal.

He made up his mind without delay.

It was plain that the redskin was after the canoe.

If he ever reached it, and was let push off, good bye to any chance of the half-breed's warning his friends.

Long before he could reach them, the Indians would be ready for their coming.

Redoubling his care whilst increasing his speed, he hurried on.

He distanced the Indian who walked more slowly, and reached first the anchorage of the canoe.

There was a tall lord-of-the-water (ahuehuelt) tree, which, undermined and bowed by the weight of its upper limbs, ran out from the bank about twenty feet over the boat, at a very slight elevation.

Its trunk formed a rude bridge.

For Benito to run out along it, to ensconce himself in the dense foliage, and to prepare his lasso for action, were acts for which he had time enough, and only just enough.

The boughs had hardly stopped their vibration, the last leaf had barely fluttered on the water, than the painted face made its appearance, foretold by the muzzle of his rifle held before him.

Seeing nothing alarming, his body followed.

There he stood erect upon the shore, one hand outstretched to seize the canoe, the other holding his gun on "the trail," while his eyes were scanning objects all around and above him, and his form was gathered up in readiness for him to leap into the canoe and shove off.

He heard nothing.

Benito was retaining his breath.

The red man then laid his rifle in the boat and knelt down to undo the fastenings.

In his hurry, he jammed a knot hard.

With an interjection of annoyance, he put his hand to his belt for his knife.

With all the weight of the leather thongs, loaded with rings of iron, and heavy with grease, Benito's lasso fell in many coils right on the kneeling form.

The noose fell over the head of the savage and encircled his left arm and his neck.

It drew tight.

The savage, drawing his knife instinctively, tossed up his right arm.

But, ill-directed, the blade struck the cord on one side and, merely shaving a little of the hide away, did no harm.

Benito, who had chosen a smooth bough and who had wound the extra length about his legs and left arm, let himself drop with terrific force, his knife between his teeth.

Such was the speed of his descent that the still struggling, but nearly choked savage was drawn from the ground, which Benito struck violently.

Disengaging himself without delay, he threw off the coils from himself, expecting the Indian to fall.

But the junction of two pieces of the cord had caught in the crotch of the tree, and there the Apache hung in his last throes.

In a second, his form had ceased its convulsions, and Benito, ascending the ahuehuelt and letting down his lasso, found the Indian dead.

Hastily taking from the body the knife, war whistle and the other equipments of the warrior, the half-breed stepped into the canoe, which he soon after paddled up to the encampment.

His story was eagerly listened to.

Devouring the breakfast by Pablo's orders, all were again in the canoe, which he hoped might pass the Indian camp by the very audacity of the attempt.

## CHAPTER XV.

### RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

It was some little time before the gold-hunters settled themselves in comfortable situations, and had got their strokes to be regular.

Pablo, the steersman, kept close in shore to the left hand, intending to strike for the opposite bank the moment any danger should appear.

Under full headway now, the canoe reached the spot where Benito had slain the Apache.

Everybody in the boat suddenly started, every face grew pale, and breathing and the beating of the heart seemed to have stopped in each one's breast.

For a horrid yell arose loud and clear at the spot.

With a push of the paddle, Steel-arm turned the head outwards.

"Steady, steady, men!" cried he; "for the women's sake, paddle!"

"Whar!" whooped Shanty, in answer

to the whoop which once more pealed from the point.

A dozen Apaches were grouped around the body of their comrade.

A couple of them saw the canoe, and one, running at full speed along shore, reached the end of the tongue of land, where, stopping short, he let fly his long lance at the boat.

It quivered as it went.

But it fell short by several yards and buried itself in the stream.

The next instant, it appeared, half its length shooting straight upwards, and then, the steel head bearing the point downward, it floated along harmlessly.

Half a dozen shots rang forth, and struck the canoe or came very close to it.

Cradle had a bit of his ear chipped off.

"A little more," muttered he, "and I'd be a gone coon!"

Another bullet went right through the side and spent by the penetration, rolled half flattened to the bottom.

A third struck Shanty's paddle, and sent a splinter against the hand of Rosina, which it cut slightly.

"Don't return fire," said Pablo, for the gold-hunters were ready to exchange the paddles for their rifles, "we must lose no time."

"I'd like to keel over that tall fellow that bled me," muttered Cradle making his paddle bend as he vigorously pushed on the boat.

The canoe was nearly abreast of the Indian camp, but out of short range.

"What the dence is that they're up to?" exclaimed Cradle, who noticed a singular commotion by the water-side.

"Bogorra!" shouted Shanty, "the devils have boats!"

"So they have!" echoed Vandelles and Benito.

Indeed, some four or five dark objects which the Indians were busy launching were the buffalo-hide embarkations of which we have spoken.

They should have been occupied by but three at the most, but now, seeing their use would be but for a limited time, it was not thought imprudent for five to be in them.

Four played the part of propelling the canoe, while the other was crouched, with the others' rifles beside him, ready to use them when necessary.

But this launch, and the time spent in their preparatory arrangements, added to that of awaiting the arrival of the Indians who had discovered the body, gave the whites considerable of a start.

Nevertheless, two of the canoes, manned by young, impatient warriors, darted out towards the fugitives.

In the prow of one stood, with his knee firmly braced, like a harpooner's, against the gunwale, a young brave, whose eagle-feather worn slanting over his left ear, denoted a chief's son.

Before even the three boats came into range, the Indians began firing.

The result was not what might be styled satisfactory, as none in the canoe were hit.

However, it is more than most men can bear, the being made a target of, and the whites were uneasy.

Observing how his friends were chafed by this exposure, and fearful no doubt of Bertha's life, Pablo gave some orders, which were carried out instantly.

They had to be done with the utmost care, though.

They consisted in changes highly important.

Pablo and Cradle as the best marks men, took up their guns.

Vandelles and Benito kept up the motion of the boat.

Shanty steered with the paddle which Steel-arm had relinquished to him.

This deprivation of one half the speed, let the pursuer approach quite near,



So near, in truth, that a shot from one of them splintered the bark again.

At the word from Pablo, Cradle fired as well as he, both aiming at the same object.

When the smoke cleared away it was seen how successful their aim had been.

Steel-arm saw how plenty men were among the Apaches; so he was not satisfied with killing one or more.

He and Cradle had aimed not at the heart, but at the powder-horns of an Indian a-piece.

True sped the balls.

One Indian had his flask split, and the precious powder fell out, while he himself staggered with the shock, like the cut of a whip.

The other fell dead without a sound; the bullet had glanced and was buried in his internals.

The others quickly took places so as to keep up the chase, but a great advantage had been thus gained by the gold-hunters.

Again Pablo and Cradle fired, with equal success, but the third time, the distance being more, the bullets fell into the river harmlessly.

The two pursuing boats came on now like arrows.

Even if two more fell in the rush, they would still outnumber the whites, who were encumbered with the two women, besides having the heaviest-laden canoe.

Again did Steel-arm and Cradle empty their pieces on the Apaches, but, though two more of the attacking party fell, the others were upon the whites.

Kneeling on one knee, and resting his other leg on the edge of the canoe, Shanty awaited for the one which meant to board them on that side to nearly touch.

Then, with such a kick with his heavy boot that the Indian boat flew off with broken frame, while its tenants were thrown off their feet, Shanty regained his upright position just in time to spit the head of an Apache on the other side with his paddle, which he wielded like his country's shillelagh.

Meanwhile Cradle and Steel-arm had shot another pair, and waited, clubbing their guns—for they had no time to reload or pick up the unused rifle.

Only one was left in the on-coming canoe.

He was the young chief's son before mentioned.

He had been slightly wounded, and was now paddling to run down the whites' canoe with an earnestness that proved the feeling inciting him.

Becoming aware that the shock would not be sufficient to damage the canoe, and—having before his eyes the failure of the other canoes' similar attempt—he changed his plan.

Giving a vigorous couple of sweeps of the paddle, he stood up straight for a moment; then he rushed forward with his war-paddle in his hand.

But—in his rage and extreme eagerness to distinguish himself before the eyes of his friends, among whom his father may have been, and who were coming down the river in the other boats—but he forgot two things: one, that his weight would depress the bow, the second, that his jump would drive the canoe from under him.

This came to pass.

The bow of the canoe not only was sunk, but the stern very highly tilted up.

Unable to stop himself, the young brave stretched every nerve and sprang to grapple the gold-seekers' craft.

His own light vessel spurned from under him, shot down to the water's edge, then recovering, was whirled down the river.

The Indian jumped short of his last

nation, but still came so close to it, that the whites were splashed by his plunge.

He speedily appeared within a couple of strokes of the canoe.

Shanty was about to help him in, intending to make him a prisoner.

"Blast your eyes!" roared Cradle, "strike him with your paddle, man! the red devil has a knife in his hand!"

And, while saying this quickly, the American leaned his revolver on the side of the canoe, and fired off one barrel.

The Indian's head was flush with the surface and Cradle's pistol almost touched it.

With brainless skull, the body rose up to the breast, and, falling over on the back, the corpse floated away.

Crack, crack! went a couple of shots.

The Indians of the other canoe, which had been pushed off and had been forced past Steel-arm's boat, were firing up stream at the whites.

Behind them, in a line, came on four more of the Apache canoes.

Then began a singular scene.

Just within gunshot, but continually neared by the canoe of the whites, fled the first Indian bark.

The whites followed it, pursuing and pursued.

Putting out their utmost strength, as much to overtake the flying one as to escape their pursuers, the gold-hunters made their boat literally fly.

After them came the four canoes of hide, which had much trouble to maintain their place in the line, so swiftly did their predecessor move.

In each of them were five warriors, unencumbered by anything save what was necessary.

The sun was pouring its brightness upon the river, but the coolness of night still tempered its rays.

The wind had gone down, and there was no motion on the river except that of the current.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CHASE.

BROAD daylight, as it was fast coming to be, is in no way favorable for Indian warfare.

There was another fact which helped the gold-seekers in no small degree.

The Apaches, accustomed to horseback, indeed living in the saddle, were not at all in their element on the water.

Still, they handled the paddle skillfully.

But the muscular arms of especially Cradle and Shanty, used to the pick, spade and cradle, were far superior to theirs in this labor.

"Keep straight after the canoe," said Steel-arm to Shanty.

"Sure I am doing that same," replied the latter.

"We must overtake it," observed the Californian.

"True," said Cradle; "if we do have to fight those after us, it will never do to let those three even blaze at us from behind."

"That's what I was thinking of," returned Pablo.

"What's the plan?" inquired Vandelles and Benito.

"To get so much within short range of them as to be able to shoot them, before our stoppage drops us too far again behind."

"It will only cost a couple of harder pulls," said Cradle, wiping his forehead; "these redskins can't stand up against a white in anything."

"They can't do better," said Shanty, in whose mind a vivid pic-

ture of now the Apaches had galloped down the bank on the party.

Benito did not like this remark, which, truth to say, not a little affected the horsemanship of such as he.

"No, no, amigo," rejoined he; "if I a good horse under me, I would undertake to beat the best Apache or Ojmanche in any feat that cavalier can do."

"There's another question now than riding," said Vandelles; "paddle, in stead of talking. It is about time for your idea to be put in operation, is it not Don Pablo?"

"Yes," replied the Californian.

The canoe increased its speed.

At this juncture, the ones behind were lost to sight, through some bends in the stream.

The whites had approached their foregoer to within a stone's-throw.

The latter was close in shore, making for the land apparently.

At the word from their leader, the gold-miners ceased paddling, and each took up their rifles.

Cradle and Benito were to fire first.

Vandelles and the Californian were to keep their guns ready to pick off the remaining man, or men, in case their friends happened to miss.

"Fire!" cried Steel-arm.

Instantly, the first two rifles cracked. The smoke floated away.

"How the devil is that?" exclaimed Cradle and Benito in a breath.

"Faith!" ejaculated the Irishman who was keeping the canoe in its course, "you've kilt three with two shots!"

Indeed, Paddy's words did not seem so very unlikely.

The canoe of the Apaches was, still under the impetus of the last strokes, proceeding directly against the bushes of the shore.

Not a soul was to be seen above its edge.

"No, no," said Steel-arm, laughing in spite of himself and the grave surroundings, "the Apaches are lying flat in the bottom of the boat. Stand ready, Vandelles!"

In fact, as these last words left his mouth, the head of an Indian was to be seen just appearing over the gunwale.

But, seeing two of the whites about to fire, he dropped again.

Lucky it was for him that he did so for Vandelles had noted his movement.

The Frenchman's bullet whistled scarce an inch above his head through the hide.

Pablo was more fortunate.

Among at the water line, the ball of his rifle entered at the mark.

With a scream, which he had not been able to suppress, an Indian leaped up to his full height in the canoe, which rocked fearfully, turned half round and fell over the gunwale, his head dragging in the water.

Benito and Cradle had given a stroke with the paddle and loaded their rifles while this was transpiring.

An arm and shoulder, employed in throwing overboard the dead Indian's body, revealed the exact spot of a second Apache.

Benito shot him, and his dead weight leant the canoe over perceptibly.

The last of the trio, not waiting to rise further stay in the canoe and fancying himself near land, rose up and leaped for the bushes.

To the surprise of the lookers-on, as well as to his own, what had appeared to be solid ground just before the bow was only a sort of floating mass of vegetation.

The shock of falling into the yielding water instead of meeting resisting ground seemed to have deprived the Apache of consciousness.

When he rose to the surface, he cautiously grasped at a pendant bough, un-



der the very eyes of Cradle, who had been waiting for this mark.

The American's rifle carried death to him, and with a slight splashing in the water, he let go his hold of the tree.

To the astonishment of the whites, the canoe, still under some progress despite the leap of the last Apache, sailed slowly, as though drawn by an invisible thread, right through an apparently impenetrable screen of verdure.

As the whites paddled swiftly up, the canoe, for a moment disappeared, as we have said, came out towards them.

Shanty, rather superstitious, looked aghast.

The others were, to say the least of it, unable to account for the fact.

They looked inquiringly at their leader. The latter smiled.

"See," said he, pointing.

Like a road, along which the Indian canoe was coming, stretched a line of water of lighter and yellower hue than that on either side of it.

"A hidden spring?" cried Cradle.

"I suppose so," responded the Californian.

And he bade Shanty keep on in their present course.

In a few minutes, all saw how true was the Californian's surmise.

Just behind the before-mentioned leafy screen ran a brook of ice-cold temperature, wide enough for a canoe to pass easily, and overgrown by trees.

It was very dark, notwithstanding the outer sunlight.

In a moment, Steel-arm had taken in all the advantages of the position.

By his direction, the canoe was run under cover, and instantly all landed except Cradle, Shanty and the Californian.

They hastily threw out the boat-load, and then pushed out again.

The three worked for life, for, at any moment, the pursuing party might come up.

But something appeared to have delayed them, for the three whites were enabled to overtake the slowly floating canoe and tow it back without hindrance along with the bodies of the Apaches.

If these had floated out into the river, it could hardly happen that they would have been perceived.

But the act was successfully accomplished.

Quite two or three minutes had elapsed before the pursuing flotilla was to be seen, at full speed, dashing down the stream, under the impression that the fugitives were but a short distance ahead.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CAVE.

WHEN Steel-arm and his two companions approached the rest of the party, the former leaped on the spot where they were standing.

"Stay where you are for a moment or two," said he.

He disappeared in the thicket.

It was not above five minutes before he returned, a couple of branches in his hand.

"I was right in my conjecture," said he; "you will find a cave of ample capacity but a little way forward. Here," went on he, giving Vandelles and Benito each one of the branches he had in his hand, "are candlewood boughs, which you had better not light until you get within the cavern. Mind your footing, as there are loose stones and damp grass, and you may roll down the bank."

The Frenchman and the Spaniard took the torches, and preceded the women.

Cradle and Shanty were still in the boat.

Pablo turned to them.

"I have cleared the way," said he, "now, we have to do a necessary, but disagreeable task. We must sink these bodies."

Stripping the Indians of all the trappings useful in any way, the naked bodies had heavy stones tied to them and were sunk.

The canoe of hide was hauled up on shore with the other.

Then the three followed the path used by their friends.

The little brook which had hollowed this channel and hiding-place, so strangely discovered, and of so much use to the fugitives, took its rise from the high land.

Its sides—which, at the point of it emptying into the river, were flush with the water—gradually rose, so that forty or fifty feet from there, the banks were quite dry.

At length the three men had to stop.

An impassable barrier seemed to rise before them.

A wall of red earth, overgrown with creeping plants of every species.

"Well?" inquired Pablo's companions.

He said nothing, but stepped forward.

There was a broad, fanlike spread of foliage hanging from a twisted tree in the rock.

This Steel-arm lifted as high as his arms would reach.

There yawned before the three a space some ten feet broad by six or seven high.

All was black inside, except where some distance back, sparkled two starlike points.

"You two had better go in," said the Californian. "Those lights are our torches. Look around and gain some knowledge of the place. Then let one of you return, for it will not do to leave this place without a sentinel."

Cradle and Shanty disappeared in the aperture.

In five or six minutes, the Irishman returned.

Pablo gave him directions as to his watch, and left him.

For a score of yards, the entrance of the cave varied but little in evenness of floor, height or breadth.

Then it swelled to the dimensions of a hall of considerable capacity, with a floor of sand mingled with crumbings of rock.

Overhead and on all sides were stalactites, glittering now with the light of the torches which Benito and Vandelles had carried, and which were now stuck upright in the ground.

There were various openings of greater or less size in every part of the walls.

While Vandelles and Benito were fixing up, each a corner of the grotto for themselves and their wives, Pablo proposed to Cradle that they should explore their new retreat.

The American was nothing loth.

So, both lit other torches which they had cut, and entered the first opening.

It ended in a deep water course, which prevented any surprise being attempted on that side.

Another was barred by solid rock.

So was a third and a fourth.

But the fifth presented a more curious sight.

It was here that a portion of the waters which formed the mountain torrent descended.

There was now only a few drops, which fell irregularly into little pools with a sullen splash.

The hill was cleft, and some forty feet overhead was to be seen a patch of sky.

About twenty or twenty-five feet above the miners, on the opposite side of the cleft, was another hole to be seen.

Creeping plants, grey from the absence

of light, and shiny with the almost continual moisture, crossed the chasm; and there were roots of trees which ran like ropes from one side to the other.

"Will you, or shall I go up?" inquired Pablo.

"Just as you like," returned Cradle.

"I'll go, then."

"Go."

Steel-arm unsung his rifle, which might be some hindrance in his ascent, took off his large silver spurs, which were of the same disadvantage, and—knife between his teeth, and lasso at his belt—started upward.

Several times he had to stop; once, when an obscene bird whirled from its nest close by his face and startled him; twice or thrice to cut crabs, which had become entangled in his clothes.

His hands often grasped roots which were not deeply imbedded, and which gave way in his hand.

But his ascent, though tedious, was accomplished without any accident.

When he reached the gap, which was his destination, he fastened an end of his lasso to a root of a tree, tested its strength by bearing his weight upon it, and lowered the other end.

Cradle was about to climb up.

"Stay," cried Steel-arm, "let me haul up some material for torches. The light is but dim here, but I am very much mistaken if there is not that here which will repay our examination."

Cradle tied a bundle of candlewood to the lasso.

The Californian pulled it to him, took it off, and lowered the cord once more.

Cradle, helped greatly by the lasso, climbed up much more quickly and much more easily than Pablo had been enabled to do.

The first thing Steel-arm did, when his friend was beside him, was to flash a little powder and ignite a torch of the resinous wood, which blazed up instantly.

Cradle, distinguishing by its brightness what had been dimly visible before, involuntarily recoiled, with an exclamation of horror.

"See!" said he.

"We are in an Indian grave," said Pablo, quietly.

Indeed, up against one corner was a kind of mummy, not a human form embalmed in an upright position like the Egyptians, but sitting, with draw up legs.

On either side of it lay a heap of mouldy rags, the bandages which had fallen off during years.

The whole figure was of a light clay color, shrunken, but glistening as if oiled.

It had not the hideous aspect of a skeleton, but was quite unprepossessing enough for one to pardon Cradle's start at discovering it.

"And here are bones! and here's a bow and arrows!" cried the miner.

"Yes," replied Pablo; "the bones—you can easily see—are those of a horse. Some chief, I suppose, he must have been, for see these ornaments," he added, going over to the body, torch in hand.

Cradle followed him, for he had recovered the coolness which perhaps he had been startled from.

The ornaments of which Steel-arm spoke were of metal.

They were shaped rudely like animals, and were of copper and gold, with one or two of silver. The copper ones were eaten away to but a shadow of their former shape, but those of the more precious metals were perfect, though tarnished.

"Gold and silver!" cried Cradle; "they are worth something, I guess."

"I should think so," responded the Californian, "the makers of these did not think of alloy. Yes, take them," he went on to his companion, who had stooped to pick them up.



"No danger?"

"There is hardly any likelihood of that," said Steel-arm, smiling; and he took up one of the rude images, a heavy gold representation of a bird.

Thus encouraged, Cradle did not hesitate to gather all the trinkets, not forgetting a couple which had fallen near the mummy.

"I s'pose we may as well be going," observed Cradle, after a long look to discover if anything of value had escaped his first search.

"Yes."

"If you don't mind it, Don Pablo, said Cradle, stuffing the treasure into the bosom of his hunting-frock, "let me go first."

"Go on, then. But why are you so anxious?" inquired the Californian, who noticed that his companion was very nervous, a very unusual thing to be seen about him.

"To tell you the truth," said Cradle, "I don't like to be the last up here with that dead Indian. It seems to me he would cut the rope while I was going down."

Pablo laughed, but a shudder crept over him.

However, he mastered the emotion, and quietly watched Cradle's descent, which was accomplished successfully.

Inasmuch as there was no one now to unfasten the end of the lasso (unless, according to Cradle's frightful fancy, the dead Indian took that office upon himself), and as descent was not so easy as the ascent, some other means had to be invented.

Pablo was a man for the emergency.

Unfastening the lasso, he doubled it, and lowered each end down.

The centre rested on another root, for the one before used, had been worked quite loose by the weight of Cradle and his spoil.

Thus a kind of ladder without rounds, was formed, and Steel-arm entrusted himself to it.

It came to within a few feet of the base of the chasm, and Steel-arm releasing his hold of one end, dropped.

He then drew down the other half of the lasso, coiled it up, and, hanging it at his waist, strode on after Cradle, who had taken up the return path to the camp in the cave.

The sight of the gold and silver so strangely found, excited some heat of language, and might have resulted in another quarrel, had not Steel-arm forced the party to remember that it was no time for discussions, and that hereafter the distribution of the treasure could be settled.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### IN THE CAVE.

"That's a good haul Cradle has made," observed Shanty, whom Benito had relieved of his watch.

"Didn't you leave any?" inquired Vandelles, whose greed was easily excited.

"No fear of that," returned the miner, raking a strip of beef out of the fire with his bowie.

Vandelles clearly wanted but a single word of support to start him on the way to the Indian grave.

Pablo saw this, and, to quiet him, said:

"All the old Aztecs buried treasure with their principal dead, just as John Chinaman burns gold paper. There was more in this tomb than ever I saw in any before, and I am very sure that none escaped Cradle's search."

"Might there not be some underground there?" asked the Frenchman, not wishing to give up his idea that where there is some, there is always more.

"There is no likelihood of it," responded the Californian. "The savages who buried that body and formed that cave, or rather found it made to their hands, were too confident no red man would invade it. As for white men, I would wager a nugget against a grain of dust, that they knew not the name, except it may be, from some faint rumor of 'shoe-wearers' with pale-faces coming from Mexico."

"So long ago as that?" exclaimed Vandelles.

"Why not? All things prove it. The state of the body, the fashion of the images, the absence of any other metal save copper. Depend upon it," went on Pablo, "the hands that interred that mummy never wielded steel hatchet-heads."

"Are there many such graves hereabouts?" went on the Frenchman, who saw in the perspective an expedition to unearth all the Indian graves in the country.

No sentiment of respect would have hocked the Voltairian Frenchman.

"Many, I doubt not," said the Californian, "but search for them here would not 'pay,' as our Down-Easters would say. Below the Rio Grande, there are more graves of this kind and more riches."

"It's an idea worth looking into and thinking over," said Vandelles.

"You would have to win over some very old Indian whom tradition makes a guide to the resting places of his fathers. Such a one may be found," added Steel-arm.

"I should say so," cried Vandelles, scornfully, "with a barrel of mean whiskey, I could buy up a tribe!"

"True," said Pablo sadly, "the red men are not the same whose naked breasts received the discharges of the conquistadores' cannon, or whose lips were cooled by spring water, not blistered with fiery compounds."

"I will set some of my friends on that track," resumed Vandelles, "even if I do not pursue the project myself."

"Tell them," continued Pablo, "tell them to beware. There are yet some full-blooded Children of the Sun, who might call profanation this disturbing of bones, and a fanatic's knife is long."

"A revolver carries farther," returned Vandelles, but the Californian's words had struck deeper than the Frenchman liked.

Whereupon the latter fell into a calculation concerning such an expedition, rightfully saying to himself that there would be no lack of daredevils who would break into their own grandfathers' tombs, much more a "greaser's" or an Indian's.

Pablo was also steeped in a train of thought, which kept his eyes riveted on vacancy, excepting every now and then, when he would drop them on that corner to which Bertha had retired after the late dinner.

Cradle was lying at full length by the fire, which he was feeding to ensure the cooking of some strips of jerked beef; eating it more from want of something better, than from any excellence in its flavor.

"The glory of heaven between us and evil!" suddenly roared Shanty, jumping up like one bitten by a viper.

"What's the matter, Paddy?" inquired Cradle.

Shanty pointed to the rock on which he had been sitting.

"Here's a lot of imps," said he, "they have got horns just like snails."

Cradle looked at the designated spot.

Sure enough, there were some very ugly animals, about three or four inches long, with little feet like centipedes, and horned.

But the American burst into loud laughter, which aroused Steel-arm.

"Sand-worms," cried Cradle.

"They're a nasty baste, anyhow," observed Shanty.

"Did you never see any before?"

"No, nor I don't want to see them again."

Any one to have watched the slimy worms crawl in and out of holes in the rock, over and under one another, attracted by the light, would have coincided with the Irishman.

"Will they bite?" inquired the latter.

"If you put your finger to them, you'll find out," returned Cradle.

"Begorra! I'll make sure that none of these, at least, can come crawling and crawling around me at night," said Pat.

Upon this, he took up a branch of a tree, which was burning at one end in the fire, and lifted it to destroy the worms.

But Pablo, who had come over to see what was the matter, arrested him in his purpose.

"I just have thought," said he, "instead of wantonly hurting these things, how much better it will be to make them furnish us a supper."

"Is it *ate* them, you mean?" exclaimed the horrified Irishman.

"No, no!" returned Steel-arm, laughing heartily.

"What, then?"

"Why, they're capital bait, and there must be fish of some kind about here."

"I'm sure I heard a couple jump out of the pool just where I stood waiting for you," said Cradle.

"I wouldn't like to be after putting one of them upon a hook," groaned Pat, with a comical expression of disgust.

"But my tackle is gone," remonstrated Cradle.

"No matter," returned Pablo, "we can find some bark to twist a rude thread from."

"And hooks?"

"Donna Rosina or Madam Vandelles will lend us a pin, or, if it comes to that, I can make a hook out of hard wood."

In a few minutes—for Cradle entered earnestly into the manufacture, as he had a passion for the sport—the necessary tackle was ready, rude, of course, but not to be laughed at.

Shanty assisted his friends to break apart the layers of rock, and there was found a quantity of the sand-worms.

Steel-arm wrapped up a number of the liveliest in some large leaves, and the three buried themselves in the more remote portions of the cave.

Cradle went to the base of the chasm and dropped his line into a deep pool.

Shanty stuck a torch up in a crack of the rock, and then took a seat near the American.

Pablo found a kind of walk along the side of the cleft, beside which, and a few feet beneath him, sluggishly rolled a black flood.

He walked up and down this platform, sweeping his line in a sort of trolling fashion.

"Whoop! I have him!" suddenly cried the Irishman, jerking out his line.

There was indeed something twisting on the end of his hook, which was a large pin which Rosina had given him.

But its weight and its struggling, or both, disengaged it, and it fell with a loud flopping sound back into its element.

The hook was found to be bent out quite straight.

"Don't be so noisy, Pat," said Cradle, who had felt something at the end of his line.

The Irishman let down his again.

All at once, both of them pulled up together, and each landed their fish.

"Blast my eyes!" roared Cradle



about to take off his capture, "I'll be d—d if the fish has any eyes!"

"Mine has a mouth, though," retorted Paddy Shanty, with a howl. "Lend me your knife, Cradle, that's a man. This rascal is sucking my thumb down his throat."

Cradle cut the throat of Shanty's fish, and the latter removed his finger.

In the meantime, Pablo had come up, noticing the disturbance.

"Here's a fish blind—no eyes at all," said Cradle.

Indeed, there was no visible organs of sight about the fish.

"I've seen such before," returned the Californian; "it is said all water from which light is absent is peopled with this sort."

"I wish they had been without teeth," groaned Shanty, whose finger had been tightly squeezed.

"How could you catch them?" inquired Cradle, laughing.

"I don't want to catch any more," rejoined the Irishman, who became a spectator, in lieu of actor.

So he looked on, while Cradle and Steel-arm drew up a dozen of the blind fish a-piece.

Securing them on a thin twig, the three returned to the fire, which they replenished to cook their captures for supper, the time for which had come.

The discovery of the Indian body had had some weight on the party, and Pablo was asked to relate such legends as he knew.

On a smile from Bertha, who looked appealingly at him, Steel-arm began a story of a Californian water-fall, on this very Horses' River, though not near the present camping-ground.

In the days of old, long before the deep solitudes of the West were disturbed by white men, it was the custom of the Apaches of the West to assemble at the great cataract of Horses' River and offer a human sacrifice to the Spirit of the Falls.

The offering consisted of a white canoe full of ripe fruits and beautiful flowers, which was paddled over the terrible falls by the fairest girl who had just arrived at the age of womanhood.

It was counted an honor by the tribe to whose lot it fell to make the fearful sacrifice; and even the doomed maiden deemed it a high compliment to be selected to guide the canoe on its hideous errand.

But even in the stoical heart of the red man there are feelings which cannot be subdued, and chords which snap if strained too tight.

The only daughter of a chief of the Apaches was chosen as a sacrificial offering to the Spirit of the Falls.

Her mother had been slain by a hostile tribe, and her father was the bravest amongst the warriors; his stern brow seldom relaxed save to his blooming child, who was now the only joy to which he clung on earth.

When the lot of the doomed one fell on his beloved daughter, not a muscle of his rigid countenance moved; in the pride of Indian endurance, he crushed down the agony which rent his bosom.

At length the day approaches; savage festivities and rejoicings are prolonged until the shades of evening close around, and the darkness of night falls like a pall upon that wild funeral-feast.

But the pale beams of the rising moon cast a mystic light upon the dark waters; higher and higher she rises in the still heavens, and the foam and the mists from the falls gleam with a soft and silvery light. The stream thunders into the dark abyss, but all besides is in calm repose; the Queen of Night stoops to kiss the laughing waves, and all nature breathes of love, and peace, and happi-

ness; the wild songs and the wilder whoops of the rejoicing savages suddenly cease; the dread moment has arrived, and a hush—an awful and mysterious hush—is upon the eager, listening crowd.

And now the white canoe glides from the bank, and is instantly swept into the fierce rapids.

From this moment, escape is hopeless.

But the young girl dreams not of escape; calmly she steers her frail bark toward the centre of the stream, while frantic yells and deafening shouts of encouragement and approbation burst from the savages who line the banks.

Suddenly, another white canoe leaves the dark shade of the forest, and shoots forth upon the stream. A few powerful strokes from the paddle of the chief, and the canoes are side by side; the eyes of father and child meet in one last look of love, as together they plunge over the cataract into eternity!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE FIRE-RAFT

It was towards day, and Steel-arm himself was on the watch.

His post was by the entrance to the secret refuge.

He was calculating the chances of escape.

One theory was that the Apaches, discovering nothing after descending the stream, had turned back—giving up the chase—and were now above the hiding-place of the gold-seekers.

Indeed, one of the sentinels had spoken of having heard sounds indicating this during the night.

But, if it should happen that the Indians were still between them and their destination, good-bye to their likelihood of ever reaching it.

The handful of whites, unless by providential means, could not, wearied as they were, contend against the red-skins.

Remembering, however, the adventure of Benito, who had been enabled to spy the enemy's camp, Steel-arm, seeing all the advantages it presented, determined to try this himself again.

Thereupon, lightening the canoe, and entering it, he started on the hazardous task, aided considerably by the white mists of morning.

His companions got everything ready to start at a moment's notice.

Two hours passed away.

The gold-hunters had eaten a hasty meal.

Cradle, with much foresight had rudely smoked those of the fish which had not been eaten at supper or breakfast.

Indeed, the American's precaution was highly to be praised, the stock of provisions was running low.

At the end of the two hours, all eyes were gratified to see the return of Steel-arm.

He was paddling swiftly.

"Waste no time," said he breathlessly; "the Apaches are not far from us, on the right bank, encamped; they are sure of us where we are."

"Shall we not try to run past them?" inquired the others.

"No, once that plan succeeded, barely succeeded, as you know. We cannot hope better fortune this time."

"Must we fight them," said Cradle, tapping his rifle.

"No, I have a plan, hardly apt to fail," returned Pablo, "I am certain almost that it is our only opening to escape."

"You're ahead of us all in ideas," honestly owned Cradle, putting out his broad palm; "here's a hand that will help you in anything you say."

"Thank you," and Pablo shook the hand. "But the first thing that is wanted, the main thing, indeed, for my purpose, is material for a raft."

"A raft!" echoed Vandelles, "we have a boat, it seems to me."

"Yes," said Pablo. Then he went on, speaking rapidly: "I see that I had better tell you all, so that you will not be working in the dark."

All listened attentively.

"In a few words, here is my project," resumed the Californian. "The Apaches are encamped on an open space facing a little bay. There canoes are tied together, some forty or fifty feet from the shore. One alone is pulled up on the bank, to enable them to draw ashore the others when wanted. A sentinel, perhaps two, is posted on the point up stream, to signalize our coming. Let us make a broad light raft, which we will pile up with light and resinous wood—of which there is no lack," added Pablo looking around.

"Plenty," said Shanty, who had gathered the fire-wood the night before, and therefore knew of the supply.

"Having made such a raft," proceeded the leader of the miners, "we will tow it down as far as we can safely go. If there are two lookouts, we will land a couple of us to rid us of them. If only one, one will go ashore. When rounding the point, we make a dash for the canoes, push the raft into their midst, set fire to it, and paddle off."

"Capital!" cried Vandelles, in spite of his jealousy.

"Caramba! why didn't I think of this," muttered Benito.

"Faith! it takes Don Pablo for these things!" cried Shanty enthusiastically.

The women smiled approbation, while Cradle, thinking deeds to be above words was already moving away.

"Where are you going?" inquired Pablo, "I thought you promised to aid me."

"You want wood for a raft, don't you?" replied Cradle, Yankee fashion, with another question.

"Certainly," responded Steel-arm.

"Well," pursued Cradle, "when we came into the opening yesterday, I noticed some logs and some driftwood on each side of the entrance."

Indeed there was quite a number of tree trunks, from which the branches had been broken, and the bark peeled off.

In a very short time, enough of them were dragged out into the cove, to a spot where the shore being gradually shelving permitted the building of a large raft.

This being only made to be destroyed, no great artistic efforts were displayed in its construction.

The corners where the logs were laid upon one another were bound by green withes, as were the adjoining pieces.

A kind of flooring was thus formed.

On this was heaped up a mass of brush-wood, principally of that inflammable matter called by woodmen candlewood, or torchwood.

All was of such a nature as to flame up into a large ball of fire as soon as a spark should be applied to it.

This being completed, a couple of strong bark ropes were attached from it to the stern of the canoe.

Into the canoe the party once more got.

Now came the critical moments.

If the Apaches, from any cause, should have given up their inaction, and should be on the move, it was scarcely within the bounds of possibility that the little band of gold-seekers could escape.

Working with the utmost caution, as they were compelled to do, the whites progressed but slowly.

They were forced to move from one



side to the other, as occasion demanded, taking advantage of every natural shield, offered by the woods and bluffs.

They reached the bend from the point of which could be discerned the Indian sentry at intervals, when not thinking the gaze of his enemies upon him, his painted face showed itself, as he looked up stream.

Here Cradle, who volunteered, jumped ashore, and disappeared in the woods.

Half an hour elapsed.

Then there appeared, cautiously waved on the side of the bushes, towards the whites, a scarf, which was Rosina's.

"Cradle's signal!" exclaimed all in the same breath.

Upon this, the canoe, and its strange attachment doubled the point, and bore for the point where the scarf was flaunting.

There, indeed, was Cradle.

He had slain the sentinel without exciting any alarm in the Apache camp.

The encampment was to be seen plainly now.

Many of the Indians were lying around the remains of their last night's fires.

Others were walking up and down the beach, in expectation that at any instant they would have to spring to arms.

The sun was just rising, and its red orb glowed through the mists.

The miners removed their hunting-frocks, in fact, stripped for their attempt like rowers in a boat-race.

Each had his loaded rifle within reach.

Steel-arm took up his former place in the stern to direct the movements.

Shanty, whose wrist, though swollen and discolored, was nearly recovered, was able to use his strength in sufficient a manner, added to Cradle's, to equal the paddling of the capataz and Vandelles.

At the word, the canoe with its raft in tow, whirled around the point.

The whole contrivance had progressed a little way before its presence was discovered.

Then, a fearful yell denoted that some one of the Indians had seen it.

On the bank was to be seen the redskins, running to and fro, brandishing their weapons.

A couple waded out to the first canoe, into which they scrambled, each having a paddle in his hand.

But already the whites were nearer the collection of the boats than they.

"Fire the pile!" ordered Pablo.

Shanty and Benito began hauling on the bark rope, while Vandelles and Cradle still paddled.

The raft was drawn up to the stern.

Benito flung some powder into an already prepared bunch of tinder and kindled the mass of resinous wood in half a dozen places.

"Now, once more to your paddles!" shouted Pablo. "A few strokes to fan the flames, and we are saved!"

The canoe, and the raft, from which now streamed several columns of smoke, were speedily in the midst of the canoes.

The two Indians, in the bark, who had tried to out-strip the whites, now began to make for the shore, the more hastily, from seeing Cradle and Shanty lift their rifles.

Their friends on shore, foaming with rage at Steel-arm's trick, were already firing upon the gold-seekers.

But they, on their leader's order, had dropped out from the cove, after being assured that the fire could not be put out.

At first the heap burned but slowly, as there was not much air stirring, but its own combustion causing a rush of wind, the flames enveloped the whole mass.

Along the water's edge it hissed, and

little threads of the melted resin ran like fiery serpents to climb into the canoes.

Above the raft, it roared and crackled, with much more flame than smoke.

Out of the half dozen embarkations of hide, four were utterly destroyed, while the other two, scorched out of all shape, floated away—their anchor ropes being burnt—still ablaze.

The savages were infuriated.

They fired shot after shot at the little party, but their very eagerness to hit their marks was their enemies' salvation.

His friends would have replied, but Steel-arm advised them otherwise.

"No," said he, "we may want our lead and powder for a better purpose."

"Do you think they will pursue us?" inquired Bertha timidly.

"Not a bit of it," replied Cradle for Pablo, "if every redman got such a taste of white men as to make them sick of it, by heaven, those screeching fellows on the bank have got it now."

"No, madam," returned the Californian, "we have dreadfully reduced the number of their band. If they could have us at their mercy, we would undergo fearful fates, but of that there is now no fear."

"Thank heaven!" said Shanty.

An exclamation, the feeling that prompted which was in everybody's heart.

## CHAPTER XX.

### OUT OF DANGER.

ALL the rest of the day the whites kept on the move.

Two and two, they relieved one another at the paddles.

They ate their supper in the boat, and did not stop during the night.

At sunrise, the miners found themselves near a high bluff, to land at the foot of which seemed to be easy.

Pablo went ashore with Benito to look over the country.

From this elevated point, much of the surrounding landscape could be surveyed.

Around them rolled out vast prairies cut up in spots by clumps of bushes.

Tall trees were to be seen in certain points, but not a single token of life.

No smoke, however faint, was to be descried.

No birds rose from the forests as if startled by human beings.

Whether the Apaches had or had not given up the chase, or whether they might not be on the chase but not as yet in sight, were unanswered questions of the gambusino and his companions.

Whatever the cause, neither perceived anything of a nature to give birth to uneasiness.

They returned to the boat with the gladdening intelligence.

All bosoms were lightened.

Exhausted by such incessant toil, they sought a little repose.

It was high time for them to rest, for their wearied arms could hardly manage, or their worn-out tendons grasp, the paddle.

The provisions were divided.

Half a smoked fish a-piece, with some crumbs of cracker and a little Indian corn, was what their supply was reduced to.

Then, one of the party was placed as a look-out upon the highest pinnacle to watch over his friends' safety, while they snatched some instant's slumber.

Their sleep was short.

Pablo still dreaded some Indian attack, by other rovers if not their former antagonists, and he feared that the sentinel, who might be, would fall into some trap.

After two hours' halt, he aroused the sleepers, and the march was resumed.

This time, but two paddles were kept in play, so that the ones not at work were allowed to prolong their slumber until the moment came for them to take their comrades' places.

With blankets, there had been arranged in the stern a species of bed.

This Bertha and Rosina used, half hour by half hour alternatively.

Besides, Steel-arm had rigged a kind of canopy over their heads with another blanket, to shelter them from the sun.

Several hours had passed after dawn.

Steel-arm descried some dark living objects on a plain.

"What is that?" exclaimed he, putting his hand up like a visor before his eyes.

"Buffaloes, by the Lord!" shouted Cradle.

"Thank heaven!" said Shanty, licking his lips; "I would like to taste bafe again!"

The forms were, in truth, those of a small herd of buffaloes.

As the canoe drew near, as if to help the whites in their intentions, they trotted down towards them to drink and roll in a marsh near the river.

Approaching as closely as caution would permit, the canoe ran ashore.

Pablo and Cradle landed.

At the end of half an hour, those remaining in the canoe heard two shots in the distance, followed by four others.

The first two were those of rifles, the others were revolvers.

The buffaloes were to be seen galloping away.

Two of them were left behind the others, trying to keep up with them.

But, on another shot, one of the pair fell motionless, while the other managed to stagger into the wood, his mane clotted with blood.

Presently, Steel-arm ascended a tree, and waved his cap for his friends to come to him.

Vandelles and Benito took up the paddles, and directed their way in all haste towards the spot where Steel-arm was to be seen.

"We have killed a fine bull," shouted the gambusino; "come and help us cut him up and carry the pieces."

Benito and the Irishman did not ask for a repetition of the invitation, but leaped ashore.

Truth to say, for the half starving miners, the juicy flesh of this capture was a precious acquisition.

In less than an hour, the animal was skinned and cut up.

The choicest pieces were carried to the canoe, along with the skin, which was useful in a variety of ways.

"Caramba!" cried Benito, joyfully, "we've just come across this buffalo at dinner time."

"He's a welcome guest," said Shanty, sharpening his knife, "and I hope to be better acquainted with him."

All fear of any immediate attack on the part of the Indians having been dissipated by the distance the pirogue had traveled, the miners tied up their boat, from which, nevertheless, they took heed not to be too far gone.

Then a fire was lit, on which were laid the still bleeding steaks of buffalo meat.

The whole party, after their long days of fatigue and privations, made a hearty meal, which restored to them almost their former strength.

"To my mind, we are now through our greatest dangers," said Steel-arm. "To-night, we will pull up on shore our good canoe, and take a long sleep. Beyond that rock which you may see below there, some two hundred and fifty or three hundred yards from here, navigation is impossible. There begin the



rapids which lead to the falls, of which I told you the other night the legend. To-morrow, we will travel by land. Two or three days will be all we shall want, I trust, for us to strike the road which is used by the miners starting from Sutter's Fort for the diggings."

"Suppose we go to-night as far as that rock?" observed Vandelles.

"No," rejoined Pablo. "First of all, every one of us will be benefited by a little rest; besides, here, in event of an attack, we are much more advantageously situated."

The night passed undisturbed.

For the first time since many days, the miners slept soundly.

They learnt long afterwards how the Apaches had attacked the horse-thieves in the cave. And how, after the burning of their canoes, dispirited and reduced in number, the remainder had not thought even of further pursuit.

This intelligence came to Steel-arm, brought by miners to whom he had afterwards revealed the existence of the Mine of Del Desierto, and the gold still to be found there.

On the evening of the fifth day of their land travel, the whites met a train of twenty-two gold-hunters on the way to the placers.

Many of them were acquainted with Steel-arm.

They ran to him, and begged him to acquaint him with some placer.

"I will show you a rich one," replied Steel-arm; "but, for the first time in my life, I lay a condition on my gift."

"Out with it!" cried the miners.

"You have a good number of wagons and horses, oxen and mules. You will let me have one of the wagons, eight oxen and six horses. We will pay you double for them to what they cost you at Sutter's Fort. If you cannot part with what I ask for without it delaying you, come with us back to San Francisco. I pledge myself to guide you to the Mine of Del Desierto, as soon as we reach the city. If you can spare them, and will do so, I will now point out to you the road to the placer."

This proposition was hailed with transports of joy.

Such was the renown of Steel-arm, that if he had asked every horse in the train as reward for his revelation, we almost would say he would have been given them without any resistance.

Therefore, the arrangement was very promptly concluded.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### SAN FRANCISCO AGAIN.

THANKS to the means of transportation which had as above been procured for them, Steel-arm's companions made long days' journeys.

It was not long before they met shanties in groups of two or three, in which groups were to be seen, by a prophetic eye, the towns which now fill the Golden State.

From that moment forward, they had no longer anybody to fear except men of their own race, for the Mansoes (submissive Indians) were the only red men who met their sight.

Notwithstanding their long rides, they were recovering their strength.

What, indeed, was such fatigue to men who had just gone through an existence so fraught with painful toil, dangers and privations?

Benito, Cradle, Shanty and Vandelles saw with joy the so long desired moment draw nigh of resting and enjoying the fruits of their labor.

Pablo alone grew gloomier of visage as they approached San Francisco.

A few days more, and he would have to part with Bertha, and bid farewell forever to that life which had been so pleasant to him even in his perils, since she shared them with him.

Every day, hour, and minute coursed on for the Californian with despairing rapidity.

He could not bring himself to believe that he could live without a sight of Bertha.

It seemed to him that the deprivation of the young woman's presence and sweet smile would be the same as tearing from him his heart or the air he breathed.

Bertha but too clearly saw what was going on in Steel-arm's heart.

Her sorrowing gaze made answer to the Californian's.

She no more than he comprehended how she could live apart from the friend who had shown for her so much love and devotion.

Often, she did not dare pray, for fear that a guilty thought might intrude on her devotions.

Without knowing what was passing in the hearts of the lovers, Vandelles felt that Bertha loved Pablo.

Wounded in his vanity rather than in his affection for his wife, the Frenchman had fits of rage which drove him wild.

At times, he almost wanted Bertha to be guilty so as to have a right to punish her and her accomplice.

Notwithstanding the usual injustice of one acting in his own cause, Vandelles could not hide from himself either the virtue or the courage of his wife, or the Californian's noble and loyal conduct.

As commonly happens in such cases, he endeavored to diminish his rival's devotion; yet, in the depths of his heart, he was compelled to acknowledge it.

Far from being thankful for such nobleness of sentiment, he raged against it, feeling that it crushed him.

There were times when he was capable of hiring cut-throats to kill Pablo; at others, he would have slain him with his own hands.

Therefore, he waited impatiently for the moment of arriving at San Francisco, vowing he would instantly start for France, in order to break off his connection with Steel-arm.

In his frequent transports, he often let escape allusions to this plan of departure, which Bertha knew too well, and which made her despair.

As for Benito, a week before reaching San Francisco, he announced his resolve to separate from his companions, and go to Monterey.

Rosina openly opposed this.

"No," she told the capataz, "we must proceed to San Francisco. Our connection offends heaven's laws, and we must have another."

"What mean you?" exclaimed the half-breed.

"We must have a priest consecrate our union."

"Do you say so?" cried Benito.

"Will you consent to be my wife?"

"Yes, Benito."

"You will! but no, it is impossible; it is some trick, a pretext for remaining longer with this man, whom I hate as much as I love you."

"No, Benito, I speak the truth."

"Do you swear to me that on arriving at San Francisco, you will become my wife?"

"I swear."

"But we can be married at Monterey, too."

"I wish to be married at San Francisco."

Rosina hesitated.

"At Monterey," she resumed, "there are friends of my family, and I—"

"Do you mean you do not want them to know that you wed a half-breed?" interrupted the capataz in his anger.

"I vow to the Devil, *voto al Demonio!* it once at San Francisco you go back upon your word and ask to return to your parents—"

"Hush! remember I have a son!" said Rosina with that sorrowful resignation which had, since Luke Kermain's death, gradually stolen over her.

"Swear this to me on your crucifix," said the half-breed, who still doubted.

Rosina took the oath.

Somewhat tranquilized by this solemn promise, Benito consented to keep on to San Francisco.

The last days of traveling were sad.

Shanty was not all pleased at the thought of parting with Steel-arm, whom he in some sort looked upon as a hero, as well as from Mrs. Vandelles and Rosina's little boy, who had taken the place in his rude affections of poor Luke Kermain.

Cradle was perhaps the only one who appeared not to care a fig about the separation in one way or another.

But, notwithstanding his mask of selfishness, he did feel for Bertha and Pablo, more than he believed himself capable of feeling for anybody in the world.

It was a solemn moment when the miners, from the top of a hill, descried, for the first time since they had turned their backs upon it, the tents and houses of San Francisco.

Bertha and the Californian exchanged an indescribable look.

With touching sympathy both turned their eyes at the same time towards poor Rosina.

The latter was regarding them with heart-breaking sorrow.

Bertha went to her and took her hand as though to associate her in their regrets and thoughts.

Rosina let her do as she pleased, drooping her head on the other's shoulder, and both mingled their tears in spite of all their efforts to repress them.

"To the deuce with women and their waterfalls!" cried Vandelles, in vexation, if not anger. "As long as there was danger, they behaved manfully, not shedding a drop; but now that we are clear of danger and about to enjoy the fruit of our expedition, they begin crying and weeping!"

Benito said nothing, but he ran to Rosina, whose hand he took.

She let herself be led away without offering any resistance, and without giving any answer to the reproaches of the capataz, who accused her of bewailing Steel-arm.

She listened to him silently, and—when Benito had ceased rebuking her, and threatening her, and had released her—she joined Bertha again.

"What are you going to do, poor Rosina?" Madam Vandelles asked her. "No doubt, you intend to return to your family?"

"No."

"Follow Benito?"

"Yes. When we reach San Francisco, I am going to be married to him."

Bertha said nothing to this, but the Spaniard surprised in her look a shade of compassion which Mrs. Vandelles had vainly tried to conceal.

"Do you pity me?" she inquired.

"Do not be uneasy, Bertha, console yourself; something tells me that I am not to suffer long. Why I wish to have our marriage consecrated is in order to give a name to my child, so that he may be shown as a legitimate son to my parents. His father's blood will always be a stain on him, but my mother is good, and I am sure she will have pity on the poor orphan, and will fill my place by him."

"Replace you, Rosina? Do you intend to abandon your offspring?"

"Oh, no!" rejoined Rosina, "certainly



not, so long as I live; but a foreshadowing tells me I am not to be long on earth."

"What an idea! Drive away such a fear."

"Fear?" echoed the Spaniard, sorrowfully; "heaven is my witness, Bertha, that, were it not for my child, death would be my utmost desire."

"Do you wish to die?"

"I do not wish to live any more; I feel I have neither the strength or courage to do so."

"Poor Rosina!" cried Bertha, squeezing her hand, "do you still love Don Pablo?"

"Yes, Bertha; but not as before. I have not henceforward the power to either love or hate, and I cannot tell whether his love would even now give me the courage to live. Like the wearied traveler who looks forward for his rest at the end of the day's toilsome journey, I have so truly given up all hope of happiness in this world as to hope and wish nothing more at present. Oh, how I wish I had died with Luke!"

"Do you commence to love him?" asked Bertha.

"I do not think that. If he were still alive, meseems I should not entertain for him more than a sister's affection; yet now—now that he is dead—I think of him every second. How he did love me, poor boy! It is to him, Bertha, learn, to him that I owe my being, I trust, resigned and able to look upon your good fortune without envy or bitterness. Oh, if another loved me thus!"

She stopped abruptly, and hid her head in Bertha's arms, who embraced her, weeping.

Two hours afterwards, the miners had arrived among the tents pitched around the young city.

They formed a kind of suburb.

On all sides were to be seen men hastening towards the diggings, which they themselves had so lately quitted.

It was decided that all should alight at the same hotel.

Vandelles and Cradle alone raised some objections to this arrangement, but Cradle made them observe that they had to be together for a similitude of lesser proceedings which were still remaining to be regulated.

This remark won the day, and the miners dismounted at the Graham House.

They dined together for the last time.

The meal was not a pleasant one, notwithstanding some bursts of boisterous laughter from Cradle and Shanty who had drunk a little more than was proper for them.

At the conclusion of the repast, Cradle proposed a toast to Steel-arm, as the organizer, leader and savior of the expedition.

This toast was hailed with enthusiasm.

Pablo imposed silence on his companions with a stern and solemn wave of the hand.

"No, my friends," said he; "before thanking me, we all have a more sacred duty to perform. Let us drink to the memory of the friends whom we have lost: to Mundiaz, Jose, Ribonne. Let us drink above all to him who sacrificed his life to save ours, to Luke Kermain."

Upon these words, which had been pronounced in a thrilling voice, each filled his glass and hob-nobbed with his neighbor.

A dull stillness reigned in the room.

Steel-arm's speech had awakened de pressing remembrances.

Amid the perils ceaselessly springing up which they had to confront day after day, and the fatigue oppressing them, the miners had scarcely had time to think of such of their companions as had died during the enterprise.

Now that they found themselves tran-

quil and in safety, they could turn their attention from themselves and drop a tear for the friends whom they were not to see again.

The men pushed far from them the bottles on which they were perhaps beginning to make too deep an assault.

The women wept.

Steel-arm took advantage of this moment of emotion, when the softened hearts were likely to be less selfish and more apt to consideration, to speak of the division of the treasure and of the portion reserved for the family of the deceased partners.

Scales were called for.

When the door was carefully closed and fastened, and the belts swollen with gold were placed on the table, after which each one took a look at the state of his weapons.

As the reader has seen in another chapter, the share of Vandelles amounted to two hundred and thirty pounds of gold, in other words sixty thousand dollars.

Each of the miners had thirty-two pounds, about eight thousand dollars.

Besides—subtraction being made of Luke Kermain's portion, which the Indians had taken from the German—there still remained to be divided: firstly, a sum of five thousand dollars, destined for the heirs of Jose and Mundiaz, by supposing that the latter would have left his share; secondly, two portions of thirty-two pounds each, remaining free through the death of Domingo and Ribonne.

As for the gold and silver images which had been found in the grave of the Indian chief, it was determined that Pablo and Cradle at least owned each a third of it.

But Pablo gave up his third, and the two portions were divided among the rest.

"First of all," said the Californian, "we must take out the two thousand five hundred dollars destined for Jose's son; I take upon myself the transmission of it to him. As for the same sum, due to the heirs of Mundiaz, it shall be put in the hands of the Mexican Consul, who will charge himself with the necessary inquiries. In case the relations of Mundiaz cannot be found, the money shall go for masses for him and Jose—they were both Catholics; Ribonne leaving none behind him, his share, as well, as Domingo's, remains, say twelve or fifteen thousand."

"To share between us?" said Cradle and Benito.

"No," returned Steel-arm. "This sum ought to be set apart to pay the sacred debt which we have all contracted towards Luke Kermain. Let us give half of it towards his relations, whom we will set aside a reasonable sum to discover."

"That's a good deal!" cried Benito.

"Too much!" added Cradle.

"Certainly not," replied Pablo; "we owe him all of it. Do you forget that had it not been for him, you would be at this moment dead, or slaves of the Indians? Let us at least leave our poor friend's relations something of what he bought with his blood, and let us not offend his memory by a selfish ingratitude."

Benito was going to interpose, but the Californian closed his mouth with an overpowering gesture of loftiness and indignation.

"Enough," said he; "it would be a shame for us to begin a discussion on this subject."

"But you are keeping nothing for yourself, Don Pablo," said Shanty.

He smiled sadly.

"I want none, my friend," answered he. "I have few requirements, and the gold I pick up in my excursions amply suffices me. It is probable that I shall

soon start out on another expedition. Once away from the 'stone villages,' my rifle and machete will let me want for nothing."

Upon these words, uttered with involuntary mournfulness, Bertha lifted her eyes to the speaker.

There was now such a communion of thoughts between her and Pablo that she immediately comprehended all the delicacy of the latter.

Although she had many times repeated to herself that a separation was indispensable, and had often vowed she would be the first to bring about one, Bertha felt herself powerless and without courage when this speech of Steel-arm made the spectre of this separation arise before her.

Her heart seemed breaking.

She felt her tears welling up, and hastened to cast down her eyes so that none should read in them all her grief.

Vandelles himself understood the nobleness and greatness of Steel-arm's sacrifice, and was on the point of shaking his hand to thank him.

But a feeling restrained him.

This man had originally some noble qualities, but debauchery, gaming, and disgraceful society had warped and vitiated them.

The germ still remained.

Unfortunately, he dwelt in so corrupt an atmosphere that every good thought was no sooner born in his heart than it was uprooted.

"Now that we are through with business," said he, "I do not see as we have anything more to do than to separate. As for myself, I am ready to drop with sleepiness, and I confess that I am overjoyed at the thought of spending the night in a bed."

"You know, Steel-arm," said Cradle, "that you promised to point out another placer to those who, like Shanty and myself, have had only a little share in the first expedition?"

"I will keep my promise," responded the gambusino, "and to-morrow you shall have the necessary information."

"Don't hurry! we want to rest ourselves before we start again," said Cradle.

"I want to have a hand in," said Benito.

"Oh, no," returned the American, "you were not one of us when Pablo made us the promise."

A brawl was likely to have arisen on this subject, but Steel-arm cut it short by declaring that Benito, having shared their dangers, should have a part in the new undertaking, if he desired.

This final point regulated, the miners separated, each going to his room.

Notwithstanding her self-command, Bertha had hardly the strength in her to mount the stairs.

She would have given all the world to be alone for a few moments in order to let freely flow the sobs and tears choking her.

Her husband spoke to her, but she hardly heard what he said.

The poor woman suffered horribly and had hardly consciousness.

Vandelles saw this plainly enough, and guessed only too easily the motive.

This drove him into an indescribable state of exasperation.

He pushed Bertha into the room with such violence that she missed her footing and nearly fell.

Ashamed of his brutality, and feeling that he might let himself be led on to something worse, he took the course of going out.

"I am going out," he said to his wife, "for you commence to tire me with your face like a *mater dolorosa*. Try to have your jeremiads over against my coming back, for they annoy me dreadfully. I forewarn you that we shall start next week for France; I hope for your



sake and his own that your Don Quixotte will not try to follow you. Tell him so from me."

He went out, slamming the door, without noticing that it was an advanced hour of the evening.

Hardly had he set his foot in the street than his gaming instincts awoke in him.

"Here it is three months since I have played," said he. "Perhaps I'll have luck. It always came after a long interval. Any way, I will only play a thousand; if I lose that much, I will come home instantly."

The wretched man did not return till daybreak, after having lost some two thousand five hundred dollars!

Furious against himself for such a failure, and certain that he would not have strength to give up gaming as long as he should be in San Francisco, the Frenchman spent the day in looking for a vessel sailing for his own country or England.

This was a matter all the more difficult from half the crews—attacked by the yellow fever (gold)—having deserted their ships to hasten to the diggings.

He at last met a captain, with whom he settled about his passage and his wife's.

Unfortunately, the vessel was not to sail before a fortnight or twenty days.

This was very much distasteful to Vandelles, but, as there was no other course, he had to resign himself to it.

As for Benito, he was wishing just as earnestly to quit San Francisco.

But he was obliged to wait for various papers necessary for the celebration of his marriage with Rosina.

As much of a gambler as Vandelles, he spent his time in drinking-dens and hells.

During this time, Pablo had fallen ill. As for the gambusino's admirable constitution, it could not fail sooner or later to yield under the unheard-of fatigues which he had supported, and which were really beyond human force.

So long as the danger had lasted, and so long as the Californian had felt how necessary he was to his companions' safety, he had kept a-foot, upheld by his energy and by his love which had doubled his strength and courage.

But, when all were in safety, when Pablo no longer owned the thought which galvanized his whole being (that he had to answer for Bertha's life), when he ceased to see the young woman, whom indisposition also chained in her chamber—then did Steel-arm feel in his turn a kind of sinking.

Deprived of the sight of her he loved, it seemed to him that everything had died in his existence, and that he was, in respect to his mental and physical faculties, like a grain of wheat which had been separated from its stalk.

One evening, on returning to the Graham House, he fell down on the stairs, being pushed into a corner (for space was of value), there remained senseless for several hours.

He was carried into his room at last, and a messenger was sent for Shanty, who was "hanging out" in the same hotel as Cradle.

As for Vandelles and Benito, they had changed their residence.

The former lodged in the "Murphy House," while the other was in a house kept by a Mexican at the entrance to the city.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AN OUTBREAK OF JEALOUSY.

DURING the first years of the discovery of the mines, the most celebrated of the learned, the greatest politician, or the most influential minister of no matter what state, might have stayed in San

Francisco two or three years without exciting the least curiosity.

No one would have paid any attention to their presence.

Steel-arm was perhaps the only man whose acts made him of any importance to the miners.

There was hardly one gold-seeker, even on his first expedition, who had not heard of the celebrated gambusino, of his prodigies of skill and bravery, of his generosity and the services he had rendered.

It is needless to say the renown, as was natural, was swollen exceedingly and that the person to whom the Californian had shown a placer, having gained fifty pounds of gold, passed for having found three or four hundred weight of the precious metal.

Vandelles' expedition had, besides awakened public attention, and all the miners spoke of immense treasures discovered by the gambusino's lucky followers.

Therefore, a rumor of Pablo's death was propagated with extraordinary swiftness through the whole city.

In less than an hour, there came more than sixty miners to ask news of Steel-arm.

And "time was money," too.

Steel-arm had recovered consciousness, but was still too weak for it to be possible for him to rise.

Wrapped up in his zarape, he remained stretched on a bed of chairs which the hotel-keeper had hastened to contrive for him.

Pablo was certainly the only one of all the lodgers in the place for whom a San Francisco landlord would have shown such attention.

But his presence was a fortune for the house, for miners hired rooms at any price in hope of meeting the famous gambusino.

Seeing the interest which his illness excited throughout the place, Pablo feared that this intelligence would reach the ears of Bertha and Rosina, with the exaggeration which almost always accompanies such occurrences.

This was something all the more to be feared, for, in his fall, caused by his giddiness, the gambusino's forehead had struck the edge of a step, so that Pablo's face was covered with blood when he had been carried to his room.

Hence came it that nearly everyone of the miners who came to ask about Steel-arm's condition, inquired whether he was dead or alive.

Still thinking of Mrs. Vandelles, Pablo entreated Shanty to go to her and Rosina, in order to inform them of what had happened.

"You will tell them that my condition is not dangerous," he added; "and you will make them understand that it would be imprudent for them to come to see me, on account of the number of people crowding the stairs."

This was a great sacrifice for Steel-arm, for he would have given the world to have near him, at this moment, the woman whom he loved with so much passion.

He fancied that he would cease to suffer if he saw her, and felt in his own the young woman's trembling hand.

But this man of noble heart, accustomed to live in sacrifices and devotion, forgot this time again of his own happiness to think only of the repose of her he loved.

It was hardly ten minutes after Shanty had left the hotel, when Pablo heard by his chamber door the rustle of a dress.

Then, a trembling hand tapped two or three times at the door.

"Come in," cried out Pablo.

His heart leaped violently, for he thought of Mrs. Vandelles.

Instead of Bertha, it was Rosina who entered.

She ran up to the Californian.

Whatever was the empire of the latter over himself, he could not completely disguise the deception he had undergone.

A man might have been deceived by him, but not a loving, jealous woman.

"It is I, only," answered she, with resigned sadness, without bitterness. "I have just heard that you were dying, and I hastened hither."

The poor woman trembled like a leaf.

Her altered voice and her disconsolate face revealed all her sufferings.

Pablo was affected to the depths of his heart, by the touching resignation with which Rosina had uttered the words:

"It is I only!"

He held out his hand to Rosina, whom he drew towards him with a movement full of kindness and gratitude.

She burst into tears and sank down by the gambusino, as if to thank him for this mark of affection.

"Rise, Rosina," said he to her in an agitated voice, "rise for mercy's sake. If either of us ought to be kneeling to the other, it is I—I who have showered upon you griefs, and who am the cause of all your woes. Poor Rosina! you have a good, noble heart—oh, why did heaven set her in my path? The thoughts of the misfortunes which have sprung from me will ever poison my life."

"You are wrong to make self-reproaches, Pablo," said she sweetly; "I pardon you with all my heart. I know too well that no one can be master of his love, Bertha is handsomer, superior to me; she will make you happy—for she loves you—though I love you, also!" added the poor woman, unable to contain herself longer, while sobs choked her voice.

"I know it, Rosina," resumed the gambusino sadly, "I know it—it's that which causes my remorse. Heaven's my witness that I have for you the deepest affection, and that I would give my life to see you happy."

Too much affected to speak, Rosina made a sign for him to be silent.

She sat down by him, wiping her tearful eyes.

Pablo took the Spanish woman's hand.

The two remained side by side, not venturing to look at one another, but weeping silently.

Suddenly Pablo started and let Rosina's hand fall, which he had kept in his.

At the same instant the door was opened, and Bertha appeared on the threshold of the room.

On perceiving Rosina, her features were overspread by one of those expressions which no pencil can paint.

There was surprise, fearfulness, jealousy, every sentiment, almost, in the rapid glance with which Bertha enclosed the two.

"He is very ill," said Rosina, as Pablo fell back on his chairs, with lifeless arms.

On these words, Bertha forgot everything. She hurried from the door to Steel-arm.

Notwithstanding her indulgence, goodness, and entire confidence in Pablo's honor, Bertha experienced one of those spasms of nervous visitation which do so much harm to women, and which make unjust and spiteful those angels in gentleness and kindness.

She was obliged to curb herself sharply so as not to speak hotly to Rosina, and not to repulse her abruptly.

It seemed to her that the latter had stolen something that was hers, and wounded her cruelly in daring to touch



the Californian, even to press her lips on his discolored brow.

In spite of her efforts to constrain herself, there was in her voice such a tremor, that Rosina divined all that was working in her rival's heart.

She quickly drew away her arm that had been passed under Pablo's neck.

The latter opened his eyes.

Rosina pushed Bertha softly before him.

"Take my place, Bertha," said she, with angelic sweetness; "it will be better for you to be the first his eyes light upon. It will do him good."

This abnegation of Rosina profoundly touched the wife of Vandelles.

It made her blush for her late promptings.

If she had not had to sustain Pablo's head, she would have thrown herself at Rosina's knees to beg her pardon.

"Bertha," said the Californian, coming to himself, "Bertha, I am happy to see you!"

"I am not alone," said she, drawing gently Rosina forward, who had stepped behind a chair. "Rosina was here before I was. You should thank her also, for she is better than I, Pablo."

Then, giving way to the generous repentance which overflowed her heart, the speaker put Rosina's hand in Pablo's, passing her own arms over the Spaniard's neck, kissing her and weeping.

"Pardon me, Rosina, pardon. I have been ungrateful and evilly disposed, and heaven knows that it is I who should—"

"Hush!" interrupted Rosina, restraining with superhuman courage the tears which were choking her; "let us speak no more of this to-day. At this moment, we have nothing to do but attend to our patient."

"You are two angels!" ejaculated the Californian, taking a hand of each with the greatest emotion; "two angels from above, and I do not know how to express to you all my gratitude and affection."

"What has happened to you?" inquired Bertha.

"A mere nothing."

"But what?"

"A swooning-fit came upon me while on the stairs."

"What has the doctor said?"

"Nothing precisely. He is to come again to-night."

"But why—does he fear anything?"

"I assure you that he has said nothing alarming in any way. Perhaps it is nothing—the mere effect of fatigue and a continual strain of mind."

"You only say this to encourage us."

"I vow to you that it is the truth. Since I have seen you here, I feel much better."

As he finished these words the three started.

"Hush!" said Rosina.

They were silent.

There was audible the rapid step of a man coming up the stairs with all his speed.

Forgetting his weakness and his sufferings, Pablo sprang for the door to fasten it.

Unfortunately, there was no bolt, and the key happened to be outside.

At this time, the landlords paid not much attention to locks. They either thought they would get their money before their patrons were robbed, or trusted to the latter's weapons.

"Hide yourselves in yonder closet to the right," cried Steel-arm, opening the door partly to take out the key.

The two women hastened to take refuge in the little closet.

Before Pablo had time to fasten the door, some one pushed up against it and entered the room, despite the Californian's resistance.

It was Vandelles.

"Well Mr. Vandelles," said the gambusino, recovering all his coolness, "what do you want?"

"My wife is here?" cried the Frenchman.

"Who says so?" returned the Californian laughingly.

"I was talking with Davis at the corner of your street, as I came to learn something of you. I saw a woman in a black mantilla enter this house precipitately. I came here, and saying I was going to meet the lady who had gone up to your room, was told your number. Where is Bertha?"

"You are wrong," replied Steel-arm, "you are under some mistake—"

"Oh, don't try to deceive me!" interrupted Vandelles, whose teeth ground with rage, and whose naturally wild, ungovernable temper had gained the upper hand. "Where is she?"

He stepped farther into the room, looking around him with the gaze of a tiger seeking his prey.

"Oh, in this closet!" cried he, leaping towards it.

Pablo sprang before him.

"Vandelles," said he with the utmost firmness, "I am in my own room, and I am sick, I forbid you going farther."

"I want to see the woman concealed in that closet," said Vandelles, who was at the summit of anger.

Frothing forth coarse insult on his wife, he moved again towards the closet.

Pablo caught him by the body to prevent him passing him.

Unfortunately, the gambusino, weakened by the blood which he had lost, could not at this moment struggle against a man to whom wrath lent such power.

"Vandelles!" cried the Californian, at the end of his patience, "if you dare to lay your hand on that door, I will hold you as a dastard and a miscreant."

"Hold me for what you will," retorted Vandelles, wrestling in fury, "you shall not withhold me from entering."

He violently grappled the gambusino.

The two wrestled for a couple of seconds.

Then Vandelles dashed back the Californian whose cheek his hand, whether accidentally or not, struck.

The Californian, already exasperated, became of livid pallor, and, clenching his fist, gave his adversary such a blow on the face that it could be heard from one end of the room to the other.

At the same instant, a figure in a black mantle stepped from the closet.

It was Rosina, who threw herself between the two combatants.

"It was I that you saw enter," she said to Vandelles, on whose rage her presence exerted a quieting influence.

"'Tis well," said the Frenchman, whose teeth chattered in his anger, while he was hardly able to speak. "I was wrong."

He fell back a step or two, but retracing them, he said:

"You have struck me, Don Pablo. You are ill now, and it is not possible for you to fight me—or else—or else I should have slain you before this! A blow! a blow to me—this must be settled."

His excitement prevented him saying another syllable.

He felt plainly that, if he remained another instant, he would let himself be drawn into some outburst which would be cowardly, seeing Steel-arm's condition.

So, unable to resist that act, he broke with a blow a chair on which his hand had rested, and rushed from the room like a maniac.

When he had gone out, Steel-arm barred the door, and ran to Mrs. Vandelles. She had fainted.

Rosina and Pablo had had much trouble to revive her.

"Good heavens! what is going to become of us?" she moaned. "What shall we do?"

"Pardon me, Bertha," muttered Pablo, sinking down on his knees before the young woman, who had been carried to a large rocking-chair.

"But," went on the gambusino, "when I heard him insult the noble woman who had sacrificed everything for him, when I felt his hand touch my face, I lost my wits and struck him back."

"My good Rosina," said Bertha, embracing her friend, "how nobly you have avenged my injustice! Without you, I would be lost. Heaven be my witness that it was not for my life that I feared at that moment; I would have gladly given it to avoid that quarrel between my husband and Don Pablo; but, if my husband had found me here, he would have slain you. Oh, heavens! why came I here? It is my imprudence that is the cause of it all."

"Perhaps it would be better for you to go home," interposed Rosina. "If Mr. Vandelles has gone to look for you—"

"What matters it now," cried Bertha, "whether he finds me or not; this duel! Oh, my good friend, swear to me that you will not fight with him."

"I will promise you this if you exact it, Bertha," rejoined the gambusino, becoming as pale as a dead man, "but I—"

"Speak."

"I cannot."

"Yes, yes!"

"I will be dishonored."

"And he will kill you," added Rosina, who comprehended the thought which the gambusino dared not confess for fear of alarming Mrs. Vandelles.

"Oh, no, no," exclaimed the latter. "Kill you, Pablo! what would become of me, then? Oh, powers of heaven, have pity on me! If you should kill my husband—"

She checked herself.

"An abyss would eternally divide us!" she thought, but she could not continue, and her words were drowned in a torrent of tears.

"Calm yourself, Bertha," resumed Steel-arm, "I swear I will spare your husband's life."

"But then he will kill you, and I could not see you die!" cried she.

"Be still a moment, Bertha," said he; "my head is so weak now, and I am so much agitated by your grief that I am not able to consider coolly. Let me think a little while, and perhaps I will find some means."

She shook her head sadly.

"You are only trying to soothe my apprehensions," she said.

"Not so."

"Yes, you are so," she went on. "Oh, I know well that if there was any way in the world of avoiding this encounter, you would employ it, but I also know that there is none."

"We shall see," said Pablo.

There was a pause.

"Meanwhile," resumed the gambusino, "you will be better if at home. I tremble with the fear that Vandelles will go thither to seek you. Whether Vandelles and I fight or not, your name must not be spoken. Return home. May heaven protect you and send me some good inspiration."

Bertha enfolded herself in her mantle, drawing the hood of it over her head.

Then, pressing the gambusino's hand a last time, she opened the room door softly.

Unfortunately, the scene which had taken place between the Frenchman and the American, and the excitement resulting from it, had aroused curiosity among the numerous lodgers of the house.

Some of them had seen Vandelles



rush down the stairs like a madman, swearing, blaspheming, and pouring out insults and threats against Pablo.

Consequently upon the celebrity of the latter, this news had circulated instantly from mouth to mouth.

More than fifty persons were already assembled on the landing-place and on the stairs.

Some were there to talk, others to see the woman come out, whose presence was vaguely suspected to be in Pablo's room."

On catching a glimpse of this crowd, Bertha hastened to shut the door and return precipitately.

She told her reason to Steel-arm.

He went and peeped out.

"It is impossible for you to go out at this moment," he said, returning. "You will have to wait."

"But my husband?" murmured the poor woman in anguish; "suppose he has gone home—"

"Wait a few instants, only," returned Steel-arm, after a moment's reflection. "I will go out presently, and speak to two or three persons, complaining of the noise in the house, which I will say fatigues me. I am persuaded that they will all go to their rooms. Five minutes afterwards, you can go out."

"But you can hardly walk," remonstrated Bertha. "I would not have you kill yourself by such an exertion!"

He encouraged her.

"Your presence here and your attentions have almost cured me," said he. "Fear nothing."

He rose with tottering step and moved towards the door.

Bertha and Rosina hastened to offer him their arms.

Sustained by the two charming females whose hearts were all his own, Pablo went five or six times around the room.

"How can I ever repay you?" muttered Pablo, his heart overflowing with gratitude towards the noble creatures who risked for him their lives and their honor.

"You have long ago paid me," returned Bertha; "it is to Rosina that we both owe such deep acknowledgement."

"My good Rosina!" muttered Pablo, holding out his hand to the Spaniard.

Carried away by the prompting of her heart, the latter pressed the hand passionately.

Without seeing Bertha's countenance, Pablo felt that she had turned pale at the other's action.

But Bertha immediately blushed for her jealousy and threw herself into the arms of Rosina, whom she embraced with a transport as though to ask pardon.

"Now, I can go out," said Steel-arm.

"But we?" cried the two women in the same voice.

"Enter the closet again. Have no fear. I can walk alone."

They retired hesitatingly, watching with anxious eyes the gambusino, who staggered towards the door, supporting himself by the wall.

"I must," he said to himself, biting his pale lips.

He waved them a sign to encourage them, and opened the door.

They listened.

In a few moments, they heard him speak with somebody outside in the entry, and move away, still conversing.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed.

The two listeners felt their hearts ready to break with expectation.

At last he entered the room and fell upon a chair.

Seeing that his strength was nearly gone, the two ran to him.

"Well?" they rather looked than said.

He drew a long breath.

"It is done!" said he.

The two women breathed again.

"But I had to stay longer than I thought," continued Pablo. "There were a good many, and I had to speak to all of them. Now that they have been told that their noise did me harm, they have gone. Give them time only to enter their rooms, and then leave the place."

"Do you feel worse?" inquired Bertha.

"No; a little giddy—that is all."

Nevertheless, he was at the point of swooning again; but the earnest cares of the two women revived him.

The two were kneeling beside him.

With a charming movement of grace and affectionate thankfulness, Bertha took Rosina's hand and held it in her own.

Their united hands were now in that of the gambusino, whose heart was filled with gratitude, love and compassion; for he understood what poor Rosina must suffer, despite her courageous abnegation.

His eyelids, weighed down by weakness and fatigue, closed gradually; but he made an effort over himself and rose in a sitting posture on his chair.

"We must part," said he. "Go, my angels—may heaven protect you."

The affectionate kindness of Pablo and Bertha, and the delicacy with which both associated the Spanish woman in their thoughts, and even in their love, had deeply touched Rosina.

Unable any longer to hate, and not wishing so to do, her easily-swayed and passionate soul had need of some other sentiment to serve as passage for the superabundance of emotion which boiled at this moment in her heart.

She would have given all the world to have the power of being killed for Bertha and Pablo, and to thus engrave her memory in the heart of him whom she loved so much!

"Stay," she said to Steel-arm, "let me go down the first. If I meet anybody, I will return and we will wait before trying again; if, on the contrary, you do not see me reappear at the end of five or six minutes, Bertha can go forth."

"But this would be exposing yourself, Rosina!" cried Mrs. Vandelles.

"What of that?"

"I will not let you."

"Let me go out the first, I entreat you," said Rosina in a supplicating voice.

"We will go down together."

"No," proceeded Rosina. "Do not deprive me of the only happiness which is permitted to me, Bertha—that of devoting myself for you. You have my love; let me at least have his gratitude and yours."

Bertha and Steel-arm knew too well themselves, what was delicacy of the heart, not to comprehend that they would hurt Rosina's feelings by refusing her what she asked.

Though it displeased them to have to accept this fresh proof of devotion, they thanked Rosina with effusion and let her go.

Nevertheless, hardly had she opened the door, than Bertha and Pablo, urged by some sort of a presentiment, rushed together to retain her.

She pushed them away gently and ran down the stairs in spite of their resistance.

Then, with ear glued to the door, they listened in anxiety to the sound of the young woman's steps going off into the distance.

So intent were they, that they hardly seemed to breathe.

Suddenly both started.

There arose the sound of voices.

A piercing scream followed.

Pablo caught up his weapons, and sprang out into the passage with the strength which a man of his energy finds

in momentous times, even if he be on his death-bed.

"Remain here, Bertha, I conjure you," said he closing the door on Bertha, who wanted to go out with him.

And he rushed down stairs.

But Mrs. Vandelles had recognized the voice which had uttered the piercing scream she had heard, and nothing in the world could have prevented her following Steel-arm.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DUEL TO THE DEATH.

DESPITE the obligations which Vandelles was under to Steel-arm, and perhaps on that very account, he had at all times hated the gambusino.

So he would have been perfectly delighted at the duel which had just been settled between them, had it not been for the peculiar position in which he was towards Steel-arm. The latter had saved his life.

Besides, he could not dissimulate that it was to Pablo that he owed his new fortune.

Vainly he sought to make an illusion of this to himself.

Notwithstanding all his reasonings, his conscience cried out loudly to him that, before fighting with the Californian he ought to return the gold which the other had so generously given to him.

On the other hand, to renounce this wealth, acquired at the cost of so much fatigue and dangers, at the very moment when he was about to enjoy it, this sacrifice was beyond the power of Vandelles.

Harrassed by such contrary thoughts, he took a course which but too well agreed with his gambling character.

He had unfortunately about him a greater part of his pepitoes, which he was meaning to take to a broker to exchange it for French gold and bills on Paris.

Instead of going to the money changers, he dropped into a gambling saloon.

"If I win," the wretched man self-communed, "I will pay back to Steel-arm all the gold I owe to his intervention. Then I can fight with him without anybody being able to say anything. If I lose though!"

He hesitated.

"If I lose," went on he, "I shall be his debtor, and our fight will be laid to that cause."

We have no need to call attention to such reasoning.

The fact is too evident for us to stop on it.

But it was none the less with the persuasion of having come to a just conclusion that Vandelles sat down at a table.

At the end of an hour, he had lost twenty-five thousand dollars.

Furious at what he regarded as a sorry trick of the jade Fortune, he left off play for a few minutes to rest and to change his vein.

While he was at the sideboard, pouring out some absinthe, Benito came up beside him to drink a glass of Cataleonean refino.

These two men entertained for one another deep-rooted aversion.

Vandelles' pride made the half-breed's familiarity more and more unpleasant to him, and Benito amused himself greatly by always treating Vandelles like a comrade.

The half-breed, for his part, deeply hated the Frenchman, and could never forgive him for the large share he had received in the expedition.

To add to it all, both of them had lost at play, and their irascible humor was increased by their ill luck.



"What are you doing, Vandelles?" inquired the capataz.

"Drinking," drily returned the other.

"No, what have you been doing?"

"Lost."

"How much?"

"I cannot tell how much."

"Caramba! You are so rich! I have lost, too—about five hundred piastres."

Vandelles shrugged his shoulders with a slighting air.

"Oh, I know that five hundred piastres is a mere nothing to you," said Benito, not fancying the Frenchman's scornful shrug.

Vandelles turned his back on him.

"But," went on Benito, "I have no gambusino who feels so much interest in me—and mine—as to show me the way of gaining fifty or sixty thousand dollars."

The tone in which Benito had uttered this speech grated harshly on Vandelles, already exasperated by his quarrel with Steel-arm, and by the loss which he had suffered.

He fastened on the speaker a haughty look and replied to him in a biting voice:

"Perhaps you would have better luck, with a gambusino of half-blood like yourself."

"Do you think so?" stammered Benito, turning pale at this insult, the most cruel that could have been put to him.

"Of course! Steel-arm has in his veins only pure and noble blood. It is quite natural for him to busy himself about men of his own race before thinking of the offspring of Indian squaws."

"Do you mean to insult me by that?" cried Benito, shivering his glass on the counter.

"I speak in general," replied Vandelles.

"If you look well into it," resumed Benito, "maybe you will find some other motive for the particular attention Steel-arm pays you. But none are so deaf as those who won't hear."

"What do you mean by that saying?" exclaimed the Frenchman, stepping up to the capataz.

"You know well enough," retorted Benito, encouraged by the attitude of the spectators.

"The lookers-on were for the most part Mexicans, who bore anything but good will towards Vandelles, who had earned general hatred by his insolence and brutality."

At this juncture, a Mexican stepped up to Benito, and whispered something in his ear.

This Mexican had been one of the curious assemblage at the Graham House, when Vandelles had come from Steel-arm's room.

Benito burst into laughter, and made some sarcastic observation in Spanish, which excited the hilarity of the crowd.

Vandelles could not understand them.

"What do you say?" cried the Frenchman, going to Benito, "repeat it before me if you dare."

"I was saying that sixty thousand dollars is a pretty sum," responded the capataz, with a railing air, "but, for all that everybody does not like, when they want their wife, to have to go to another man for her."

On this allusion to the Frenchman's visit to the Graham House, coarse bursts of laughter made the round of the hall.

"That's probably the reason of your remaining here, while you quietly leave your Rosina with Steel-arm," rejoined the Frenchman in a stinging voice.

"Ha!" exclaimed Benito.

"I saw her in Steel-arm's room," proceeded the Frenchman.

"Rosina!" yelled Benito, becoming livid with jealousy. "You lie!"

"Dare you say this to a white man, you half-breed dog!" cried the Frenchman, rushing on the capataz, with his machete in his hand.

But Benito was ready for him.

He had also unsheathed his sword and was standing on guard.

The by-standers prudently fell back, and formed a circle round the combatants.

"Courage, Benito!" shouted some Mexicans, "maintain the honor of the country!"

"Sail in, Vandelles! Go it, Frenchy!" said the Americans; "give the 'greaser' a lesson."

The two adversaries had no need of goading to increase their anger.

They flew at each other in fury, and dealt and warded off terrible cuts which succeeded each other with dazzling rapidity.

Vandelles, who admirably could manage the small-sword and broad-sword, had great superiority over Benito, although the latter passed for one of the most skillful drawers of the machete in all the Golden Land.

Incapable of fighting with a firm, un-moving foot against his adversary's perfect play, Benito could only hope success by his agility and by the leaps by which he avoided such strokes or thrusts as he could not parry with his blade.

Sometimes, he stooped to the ground, there crouching like a tiger-cat gathered up for a spring; then he would bound upon Vandelles, raining on the Frenchman a shower of blows, but drawing back when the other would reply.

Notwithstanding the ape-like activity of the half-breed, the advantage always remained on the side of Vandelles.

He was unhurt, while Benito had received many wounds.

Seeing that he would soon fail from loss of blood, the half-blood collected all his forces and rushed upon Vandelles.

The latter fended off Benito's cut with so forcible a *parade* that he sent the machete whirling with a ringing sound out of the hand of the capataz.

"Pick up your sword, Indian dog!" shouted the Frenchman, holding up his machete.

To whatever height his rage had mounted, he hesitated to strike a disarmed enemy.

Wild with rage, Benito snatched a revolver (which one of his friends and countrymen had officiously held out to him), and fired two barrels at Vandelles.

Missed by the first, but hit in the breast by the second bullet, the latter dropped his machete, and fell back, staggering, two or three paces.

Then he turned half round and fell into the arms of some Americans who had hurried to him.

The crowd rushed to him to see if he still breathed.

Benito took advantage of the tumult and confusion to escape from the hall.

Vandelles' words still rang in the half-breed's ears.

His whole mind on his jealousy, he hardly thought of the murder he had just committed.

Holding in his hand the revolver with which he could yet fire four shots, he ran at full speed towards the Graham House.

A species of furious intoxication, caused by all that had transpired and by the triple-roweled spur of jealousy, rage, and bloodshed, sent his blood up to boiling heat.

With rolling eyes and discomposed features, he seemed rather a ferocious beast than a human being.

Fate willed it that, on arriving at the door of the Graham House, he saw a woman come forth.

It was Rosina, as we know.

Benito gave a yell

The worst he had imagined seemed to have come true now.

He threw himself upon her, and fired a shot with the revolver almost touching her.

She uttered the scream which Bertha and Pablo had heard.

Fearing that he had not mortally wounded her, Benito whipped out his navaja.

He stabbed her with it twice or thrice.

The unfortunate woman had already received three wounds before the lookers at the bar of the hotel had been enabled to come to her help.

They sprang on Benito.

"Lynch him! Lynch the d—d greaser!" was the cry.

"A rope! a rope!"

"Run for Mr. Wilson at the corner—he belongs to the Vigilance Committee," said Mr. Graham, sending off one of the boys of his hotel.

For a moment it seemed that Benito had been mastered.

He was surrounded by a number of men, and full twenty hands were laid on him.

But he was like a madman.

By kicks, and blows, bites and twists, he found means to extricate himself, and stood alone, menacing the people with his revolver, still smoking almost.

At the same time he drew back towards the door, which he had just reached, as Steel-arm appeared, coming down the stairs, four, five, six steps at a time.

"Rosina!" exclaimed the gambusino.

"She is dead!" came from the crowd, which divided to let the new-comer see the Spanish woman.

The half-breed was not devoid of fearlessness, our readers have seen this, and fury doubled at this moment his natural courage.

Nevertheless, he shuddered from head to foot at meeting Steel-arm's implacable glare.

Frozen by a terror, before this unknown to him, he turned to flee, but somebody had profited by this time to fasten the front door.

"Stand back, all of you!" said Steel-arm.

His tone was such that it sent a thrill through the veins of all who heard it.

They hastened to obey.

Steel-arm and Benito were face to face, hardly eight or ten steps apart.

Standing on one of the bottom steps of the staircase, Pablo overlooked the scene.

Benito's back was against the front door.

He held the machete in his left hand, and the revolver in his other.

A cloud as of blood obscured his gaze.

Pablo's eyes seemed to fascinate him.

Dead silence reigned around the two thus confronting.

Each looker-on held his breath, and felt his heart beating slowly under the pressure of expectation.

On seeing Steel-arm make a movement to descend, Benito dashed his hand over his eyes swiftly, as though to sweep away the imaginary bloody fog which bedimmed his sight.

Then taking aim at the gambusino, he pulled the trigger.

The report was still resounding when the half-breed sank on the floor.

With a single bound Steel-arm had reached his enemy, and had struck him with his bowie-knife.

The stab had been given with so much force and precision, that not only had the blade of the weapon penetrated its whole length, but the very guard of the hilt had left an impress on the bruised side of the half-breed.

This blow has remained celebrated in San Francisco, and often turns up in conversation, when duels and knives are spoken of.



Benito fell like one struck by lightning.

The dagger point had reached his heart.

Leaving the avenging weapon in the half-breed's side, Pablo ran to Rosina.

The latter's pale face was resting on the lap of Mrs. Vandelles.

The gambusino took up the poor woman in his arms like a child, and carried her into the nearest room.

Whatever was the curiosity of the spectators, no one ventured to follow the gambusino, except Shanty who had just arrived.

Rosina still breathed, but she could not speak.

On seeing Bertha and Pablo who wept beside her, the unhappy women smiled on them, with angelic sweetness.

She, with an effort, took Bertha's hand and put it into Pablo's.

Then she looked around as for one absent, and lifted her eyes upward.

"I am going to rejoin Luke," she seemed to say, "and will pray for you with him."

A priest, whom some of the Spaniards or Mexicans had gone for, arrived in haste at this juncture.

Sustained by Bertha, Rosina half rose. All hope of saving her was completely lost.

She was made to take a cordial which strengthened her a little, and gave her power to finish her confession.

As the last sacrament was being administered, Shanty entered, carrying in his arms little Pablo, Rosina's boy, which he had gone after at her hotel.

The good Irishman had run so fast that he was out of breath and could barely speak.

Rosina thanked him with a grateful smile and held out her hand, which the miner hardly dared to touch.

Frightened by the saddened faces of everybody and by the blood which he saw on his mother's clothing, the little boy began to cry.

Rosina wished to take him up, but she had not the power.

Bertha, whom the child much loved, took him up in her arms and calmed him with kisses and soft words.

Through his fright, the little boy recognized Steel-arm, who had always been kind to him, and held out his arms to to him without leaving those of Mrs. Vandelles.

A cloud passed over Rosina's face.

As if to thus drive away all the evil thoughts which came surging on her brain, she kissed many times the crucifix which she held in her hand.

Then, lowering upon Bertha and Pablo her gaze, become once more calm and pure, she smiled on them as before, and glanced at the child with uneasy, suppliant look.

Steel-arm laid his hand on little Pablo's head, and said:

"I adopt this child, and swear to watch over him as if he were my own son."

"And if any accident happens to Mr. Verrers, I make the same oath!" cried Bertha, kissing the little boy.

This time again Rosina shuddered, but she looked on the cross and retook her serenity.

The child was put down by her side.

Some minutes after this, the unfortunate woman had yielded up the ghost, her head pillowed on Bertha's bosom, her eyes riveted on Pablo, who was weeping, while he held up her son.

Although the death of Vandelles was known to almost all the people in the house, no one had dared to impart it to his wife.

When Rosina had given her last breath, Shanty came up to Steel-arm.

"Well?" inquired the latter.

Shanty drew him a little to one side.

"Vandelles is dead," he whispered.

"Speak louder! I cannot have heard you aright."

Shanty repeated his words.

"Dead!" said the gambusino.

"Benito killed him."

"How?"

"Shot him."

"Wherefore?"

"Here's Johnson, who was a looker-on at their fight, he can tell you more about it than I can," responded the Irishman.

"Where is he?"

"Out in the entry."

"Show me him."

Pablo ran up to the man whom Shanty had pointed out to him.

He was an American from Boston.

Johnson related the story of the duel of which he had been a witness, and of the tragical end of the Frenchman.

"What has been done with Vandelles?" asked the gambusino.

"I'll be blamed if I know," returned Johnson; "he's cold dead, though. I say, Dick," added he, turning to a friend, "what have they done with Vandelles' body?"

"It was taken away, I reckon, to his hotel," was the reply.

Pablo let his head sink on his hands.

While he sought for some means of breaking this frightful intelligence to the widow, he heard Bertha utter a scream and saw her hasten towards the door.

One of those officious persons, who are to be met everywhere, had imparted to the young woman the news of Vandelles' death.

"Go to the poor woman, father," said Pablo to the *padre*, who was still praying beside Rosina.

He tried himself to follow the priest; but his strength, exhausted by so many continuous shocks, failed him now entirely and unexpectedly.

He fell back, and for three hours showed no signs of life.

He was believed to have died.

He did, however, return to life, but he was in a raging fever.

For more than a month, he was in delirium.

There were at times fits so furious upon him that it took eight or ten men to hold him and prevent him from jumping out of the window.

For several days, a sentiment easily understood withheld Mrs. Vandelles from coming to see Steel-arm.

The scene in the gambling-house and Benito's words had placed the young woman in the most cruel situation that could be in connection with the only friend remaining to her on earth.

It was not the dread of public censure that arrested her.

Independently of her love for Steel-arm, the latter had given her so many proofs of devotion that—were it only in the name of gratitude—she would have braved public opinion and all other considerations.

One thing alone retained the poor woman: a kind of respect for the memory of her unworthy husband.

Nevertheless, when Shanty, coming to her, announced that the doctor had given over Steel-arm's case, and that, in his delirium, he incessantly called Bertha to him, the poor creature's heart could bear it no longer.

She ran to Pablo, and never left his pillow.

The gambusino returned to health.

But his recovery was a very long one, for fever had worn him out, enfeebled so greatly as he had already been by previous fatigue.

In this state of weakness, another fall would have killed him outright.

Hence, the first days of his convalescence were full of inquietude and anguish

for the poor woman who watched by his bedside.

Throughout three weeks—at any moment of which death might have come—Bertha spent most of her time as Pablo's nurse.

No kind of prayer was so effective as to be able to make her abandon her post.

Holding the sick man's wasted hands in her own, she kept on him her impassioned gaze, as though to dispute possession of him with death and to warm him with the fires of her heart.

How was it that this weak woman, who had undergone before this so many fatigues, wrestlings, and griefs, could resist such trials?

Heaven alone could tell

Heaven, which gives mothers the power to pass night after night of long months hanging over the pillows of their babes.

It was only when the doctors declared Pablo to be out of danger, that Bertha would consent to take a little rest and let herself be replaced by Shanty, who, also, had kept faithful company with the gambusino.

As often happens in such cases, Mrs. Vandelles fell ill herself when Pablo had completely recovered; but this illness, caused by wakefulness, was not of long duration.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CONCLUSION.

Is it necessary for us to tell the end of this story?

The reader must guess it.

Bertha and Pablo have bought their happiness at the price of so many dangers and sufferings, and so much devotion that no one can reproach them.

At the expiration of her mourning, Bertha married him she loved.

They quitted the Golden Land, where everything recalled such cruel recollections to the young woman, and went to New York City.

There they now dwell, with Rosina's son, whom none would think other than their own.

Their own offspring call him "brother," and the cares are the same on the true children and the orphan.

This orphan will be rich one day.

Neither Pablo nor Bertha were willing to touch the thirty thousand dollars still remaining to Vandelles at the day of his death.

This money is laid aside for Rosina's son, who will, at his majority, find himself coming into a sum of some eighty thousand dollars.

As for Mrs. Verrers' children, they have the personal fortune of Pablo, who has sold all his Californian property.

Shanty has given up mining also, and is a well-to-do landlord in New York. He often calls upon Steel-arm, of whose children he is a favorite, and tells them stories, that seems of fairy land, of the treasures in the bosom of the Golden State, and of the gambusino's deeds.

Not to be accused of omitting anything, we may add that Cradle has made his fortune in California, and is one of the millionaires of San Francisco.

He pays once in a while a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Verrers, the only persons East, he says, whom he takes the trouble of remembering.

The last we heard of him, he had invested largely in the "Chiriqui Gold Discoveries," whose metal images must have reminded him of the famous Return from the Placers.



## THE SALTEADOR OF SAN FRANCISCO.

"You at San Francisco, Mr. Elson?" exclaimed a fat Englishman, of ruddy, jovial physiognomy, as he shook the hand of a man he had met in Dupont Street. "What wind has blown you across the plains?"

"I was growing tired of life," replied the other, a handsome young fellow of twenty-five or twenty-six, whose light hair, soft and pink complexion made him look like a girl. "I heard everybody talking of California. I thought I might as well see such a wonderful land before I died, and here I am."

"Looking hearty, as I see."

"How about you, Mr. Hosmer?"

"Oh, my pocket was nearly empty. I was beginning to see that my corporation was increasing, while my pocket-book suffered the reverse. I was turning to obesity and poverty, ruin and apoplexy. I said to myself that a trip to the Land of Gold ought to be good for both indispositions, and I have been three months in San Francisco. How are the folks in New York?"

"All well. Some of the ladies are married."

"Very natural."

"Well, what are you doing?"

"Nothing."

"How about fortune?"

"The jade is probably married, she has not visited me yet."

"And the belly?"

"Alas! it doesn't diminish a whit too quickly, for my purse is nearly at low tide, and I will have to be off for the mines. The feed there, is said not to be extra rich!" groaned the Englishman.

"Where are you going now?"

"I am only walking about. Join me?"

"As you like."

At the end of an hour's walk the two friends had reached one of the clumps of trees which were to be met in the outskirts of San Francisco.

They were deliberating whether to turn back or go on, when they heard a shot, followed by a heart-rending shriek.

Elson and Hosmer instantly hurried to the wood.

Lighter of foot than his companion, Elson took the lead.

On arriving at a bend of the road, among the pines, he saw, seven or eight hundred paces from him, a man stooping over the ground, and trying to raise a woman who was stretched on the road.

Some steps farther on a body was lying in a pool of blood.

The one who bent over the female seemed to be speaking to her with great spirit. At times he shook his fist at heaven, and struck his forehead as if he meant to break it; but Elson could not see whether it was anger, or in threat or despair, that caused so violent a pantomime.

A handkerchief of black silk and a broad sombrero, almost entirely concealed the features of this man.

He held in his hand a long rifle; in his belt appeared the butts of two pistols and the hilt of a bowie-knife.

On seeing Elson coming up, he rose with a spring, and began hastily loading his gun.

Notwithstanding this hostile demonstration, the New Yorker none the less continued to advance, although he had no other weapon than a revolver.

At the moment when the man levelled his piece to take aim at the new comer, who was but a couple of hundred feet from him, the young woman rose on her knees, and lifted her hands supplicatingly.

The *salteador*, or highwayman, hesitated for a moment.

Then, he lowered his gun, and slowly retreated into the wood.

Elson was going to run after him, but the young woman stopped him with her cries.

"Are you hurt?" he inquired.

"No, sir," she replied in English.

"This man?" said Elson, kneeling down beside the body.

"Dead! he could not have less life in him," said Hosmer, who had come up.

"How is he wounded. In the head, there's blood on it."

"No, here it is. A bullet has gone through him from side to side."

"Horrible!" muttered Elson, wiping off some blood which had spotted his hand.

"You will have to get accustomed to such sights, nevertheless," observed Hosmer, "it is a kind of spectacle only too common in California. Rifles, machetes and revolvers are the judges employed for the least thing in this confounded country. One night, I had to empty three chambers of my revolver to be let eat in peace a rabbit that I had killed that very morning with my own gun."

While the Englishman spoke thus, till breathless with his run, Elson was softly questioning the young girl who had sank down on the trunk of an overturned tree, hiding in her hands her tear-flooded face.

Suffocated by sobs and nervous spasms, she remained a quarter of an hour without power to reply to the American's inquiries.

She at last informed him that she had been out walking with the person who was now a corpse, and who was an American named John Wharton.

At the moment when the two entered the patch of forest-land, a man, lurking in ambush under the trees, had shot at Wharton, who had fallen dead.

"How comes it that the fellow did not rob your companion?" inquired Hosmer, showing a tolerably well-filled purse which he had drawn from the victim's pocket.

"He did not have time," replied the girl, after some hesitation.

"Did he harm you?"

"No, sir."

"What did he say to you when we saw him kneeling by you?"

"I do not know, sir; I had lost consciousness."

"Ah!" said Hosmer, "no doubt he took advantage of your swoon to remove your purse and jewels?"

She shook her head.

"A queer thief!" muttered the Englishman.

"Would you like us to take you to the city, miss?" asked Elson, who saw that his companion's interrogation was putting her on the rack.

She accepted at first with eagerness; but, proportionately to their approach to the city, her pace slackened and embarrassment was written on her countenance.

After having refused Elson's arm—the young man having perceived that she could hardly keep a foot—she finally took it, and leant upon it where the walking was bad.

On coming to the first houses, or, rather, first tents, which formed a kind of village at the entrance to San Francisco, Elson felt the girl's arm tremble in his own.

She turned pale, and her face expressed the most heart-felt anguish.

"Are you ill?" he asked with feeling.

"I wish I were dead!" murmured she in a low voice, and as if speaking with herself.

There was a pause.

Elson was thinking, while examining with a side glance the woman upon his arm, of whose name he was still ignorant.

The girl offered a type of beauty very remarkable, and very difficult to describe.

She had the black eyes and hair of a creole, at the same time as the figure and complexion of an European.

Although she replied in English to Elson, her voice had a foreign accent which Elson endeavored vainly to define.

With all this, she was really lovely.

Her large eyes so limpid and clear, and her handsome forehead, inspired confidence and sympathy.

Although her eyes were red with the tears which she never ceased to shed, and although her face was discomposed by inexpressible anxiety, the young American felt himself attracted, by a singular charm, towards this splendid young creature.

As for Hosmer, while thinking the stranger very pretty, he was pondering over the singularity of their meeting, as well as the visible confusion with which the girl had answered his questions.

He studied her with a cautious gaze, and tried to discover, by her bearing, manners, speech, etc., to what class of society she belonged.

Although she was dressed very simply, and even quite poorly, her attire was not that of the lowest rank.

The manner in which she expressed herself, announced also, that she was one who had received an education above the average.

Taking it all in all, the scrutiny was rather favorable for the girl; but Hosmer could not help frowning, when he noted that she did not give a reply to Elson's question.

"In what part do you live, miss?" inquired the Briton. "But, first of all, begging your pardon, what name am I to give you?"

"Martha," she replied.

"Martha—well?" said Hosmer in the tone of one who expects the remainder of an incomplete sentence.

She blushed, and tears came to her eyes.

"Martha Dietrich," responded she at length, in an embarrassed voice.

"I would wager a hundred pun's to ten that that's not her real name," said Hosmer to himself, while, with suspicious look, he studied the workings of the girl's features.

"Are you a German?" inquired Elson kindly, who wished to allay the agitation under which he could not help perceiving the poor girl labored.

"My father was a German, sir; he married, at Vera Cruz, my mother, who lived in the suburbs of that city. I was born at the City of Mexico, where my parents dwelt."

"Well, Miss Martha," resumed the stout subject of her Britannic Majesty, "shall we take you home? Or had we not better go at once to the police to have your deposition on the subject of the murder of your companion?"

"Oh, no, no, not now; hereafter!" ejaculated the girl starting, and throwing up her hands in terror, an action which made the latter frown again.

"Then, where do you live?" he pursued, without letting himself be checked by the discontented look of his companion.

She left the latter's arm, and leaned against the wall of a house, in an attitude of the most complete discouragement.

"Leave me here, sir," she said to the American. "May heaven reward you for your kindness to a poor girl!"

"You cannot mean to remain alone here!" exclaimed Elson, affected by her sorrowful tone. "Miss, we are gentlemen, and I vow to you that you inspire us both with real interest. Is there any motive that prevents you from going home? Can we be useful to you in any way?"

She shook her head.

"Good-bye, sir," said she "good bye



May heaven repay you for your kind words."

"I will not go away until you have answered me," returned Elson, while Hosmer let out his impatience and curiosity by poking and stabbing the wall with his cane ferule. "Place your confidence in me, and speak to me as a sister speaks to a brother."

Upon these words, uttered in a gentle, affectionate, but firm voice, the poor girl could no longer master the sobs choking her.

She covered her face with a handkerchief, and fell to weeping bitterly.

"Humph!" said Hosmer, joggling his friend's elbow, "this is getting tiresome. Suppose we cut clear from this Ariadne!" subjoined he, in an affected voice whose accent contrasted greatly with the jesting tone he attempted to assume.

Elson replied to him only by a gesture of indignation.

"Hear me, miss," said the New Yorker, "you cannot remain in the streets. However busy people always are in great cities, and especially in San Francisco, there are some idlers who will remark you, and you will be exposed to insult. Allow me to conduct you to a hotel. A room shall be there given you, and you can remain there until you find it desirable for you to return to your residence."

"Alas, sir, I have none," returned she, bursting into tears.

"How's that?" exclaimed Hosmer, who could not help nudging his friend again. "So you are lately arrived in San Francisco?"

"Only three days, sir."

"Well, where have you been living during those three days?"

"In a house to which I would never return if my life depended upon it!" answered she, with much energy.

"Humph, humph, humph!" coughed Hosmer, with a formidable crescendo.

Notwithstanding her disheartened condition, his hearer only too well comprehended the meaning of these repeated "humphs!"

"Good heavens!" she said sorrowfully, "it is as I feared. Now, you have a bad opinion of me—unfortunate girl that I am! Oh, sir," she proceeded, turning towards the young American, and lifting to him her clasped hands, "do not think ill of me. I am poor, and to be pitied! All appearances are against me; but before the Heavenly Power which hears me, I am not one with whom even your slight acquaintance should make you ashamed of."

"Your face and your tears speak for you," rejoined Elson; "on my honor, I believe you! So, have no uneasiness in that respect."

"How good you are!" she exclaimed taking the young man's hand, but she let it drop immediately as though a secondary thought had prevented her pressing it.

"Yes, too good," muttered Hosmer, who had as much fear of being "taken in" as any sharp Yankee.

"Listen," said Elson. "If you have no abode, it is all the deeper reason for your going to a hotel—I will procure you a room. Do not be afraid," he added quickly, seeing that she was opening her mouth to interrupt him; "I will take upon myself the settling with the landlord."

"But, sir, there will be left nothing for me to do," murmured she, in a voice broken by painful confusion.

"Of course not, when I take everything upon myself."

"I thank you with all my heart, sir; but I cannot accept this—from a stranger. What would you—what do you think of me? Can you suppose—"

"Nothing at all, miss. Judging by your face alone, but now, I have felt every confidence in you. Now, you

look at me. Have I the appearance of a man who is capable of abusing your loneliness, and of wishing to profit by your unfortunate situation?"

She stole a timid glance on the open, pleasing countenance of the young man, who stood before her.

"Oh, no, sir," she murmured, with a tone that proved her conviction. "Pardon me for my fear; but if you knew—"

"I don't want to know anything now," interrupted Elson. "Here is a hotel—the 'Union House.' We will recommend you to the master of the house. Get everything served to you of which you have need. I will come to-morrow to get news of you. If you should have need of me before then, you will find my address in this," added he, holding out his pocket-book, in which he had slipped a bank-bill. "You can let me know."

"And here's mine," said Hosmer, who, in spite of his gruffness and suspicions, felt himself attracted, despite himself, towards the girl.

A few minutes after this, the two entered the Union House.

Elson took the lead, and opened operations by putting fifty dollars in the hands of the hotel-keeper.

He next ordered the girl to be furnished with whatever she might have need, and to be attended to.

He left his address, and said that, the moment Miss Dietrich should have exhausted the advance, he would supply a further sum.

This business completed, Elson rejoined his new acquaintance, whom he had left in the parlor with Hosmer.

"Good-bye," he said, bowing to her. "To-morrow, we will talk over business—your affairs, if you like," he hurriedly subjoined, "for, of course, I wish to know no more than what you please to impart."

"May heaven bless and recompense you!" murmured the girl, more touched by the young man's delicacy than by his generosity.

"What do you say to our going into the bar-room for a glass of punch or a julep?" said Hosmer, as the two walked out.

"Thank you, I am going to my hotel," rejoined Elson, who had a strong desire to be alone.

"By the bye, Frank, where do you stop?"

"At the 'Hotel of the Crown.'"

"I at the 'Gold Bar;' a couple of doors off. I will accompany you."

"Thank you."

"My dear friend," said the Englishman to Elson, who walked silently and moodily along by his side, "as I have been in these 'diggings' longer than you, allow me to give you some advice."

"I will be glad to hear anything from you."

"Much obliged. Ninety-nine hundredths of the population of this place is composed of the scum of all nations. Excepting a few rare persons, like you and me, some functionaries and learned men, this mass is composed of men bent on making their fortunes by all possible means—even by honest ones," as a paper the other day said. "The female portion is not a bit better; worse, if anything."

"Why do you tell me this?" interrupted the Englishman's auditor in ill-humor.

"So that you may know," answered Hosmer, with unmoved good nature.

"On account of this girl, is it?"

"Precisely, on her very account. I will commence by telling you that in me also she inspires much sympathy by her looks and her voice. But confess that appearances are not favorable for her story."

"How do you mean?"

"Firstly, has she given us any reason for her presence at the spot where we

met her, or for the murder of her companion? Did you not notice her embarrassment when I asked her to come and make her deposition at the police office?"

"What does that prove? Who cares about appearing as witness before the justice of this country?"

"That's so. But, in short, this girl has been three days in San Francisco, and yet cannot tell the house where she has lived."

"She would not tell—she never said she could not do so."

"So you're defending her?"

"And you're attacking her?"

"Certainly not; I do not attack her, for I tell you that, in spite of everything, I believe her an honest person; only, I cannot help making you remark—"

He broke off, of himself, on seeing that Elson was listening to him with the utmost impatience.

He snapped his fingers, and smiled, and took leave of his friend.

In the afternoon of the day ensuing, Elson presented himself at the Union House.

Instead of going up to Miss Dietrich's room, he sent for her to come to the sitting-room.

She hastened to Elson and poured out her gratitude in such effusion as to move the New Yorker considerably.

"I come to place myself at your disposal, miss," he said; "but allow me, before anything else, to speak a few words. I wish so to do from a desire to have you persuaded that, in offering my services, I have no ulterior design, the bare idea of which would cause you a blush. Tell me of your position merely what you please. Remain in San Francisco, or leave it; permit me to see you or deny me admittance; in short, determine yourself on your own fate, and rest certain that I will frankly conform to your intentions. Do you believe me?"

"I do, sir," she replied with emotion, as she held out her little hand which he pressed respectfully in his own.

"Now what can I do for you?"

"Alas, I know not—I cannot tell myself," she responded, sadly, "I wish I had the power to answer your kindness by an entire frankness, unfortunately I cannot tell you all."

"My father was a banker at Vera Cruz. A man in the country who owed him some money, incited the people of the neighborhood against him, and our family had to quit those parts. At Mexico, my poor father was mixed up, quite involuntarily, in a brawl, during which a man had been killed by a knife stab. He was summoned as a witness. The officials imprisoned him in that capacity. The murderer remained unpunished, as always happens in such a case, but my poor father was ruined. My mother died with grief, and my father soon followed her to the grave, an old man before his time."

"My brother and I were left alone, without any means of support."

"My brother started off for San Francisco."

"Six months afterwards he wrote home to join him. I hastened to do so. One of his friends, the man whose corpse you saw yesterday beside me, was waiting for me at the wharf to take me to my brother."

"This man was a wretch who conducted me to a house of ill-fame. Thanks to heaven, I escaped from it, having to leave behind the scanty wardrobe which still remained to me. I met John Wharton some little way from the house, and reproached him for his conduct. He said that he had fallen into an error as well as I, and that he, hearing of it, was coming even then to undeceive me, and to remove me."



"Your brother is waiting for you three leagues outside of the town, at the Rancheria of San Felipe," he said to me; "I will guide you to him."

"I followed him without distrust; but this was once again a trap the villain had spread for me. Fortunately, a robber sprang out from the wood and killed the wicked man at the first shot."

"And the salteador did you no harm?"

"None, sir; besides, he had hardly time to speak to me before you came up."

"What did he say?"

"I cannot say," she murmured, casting down her eyes; "I was so agitated, so frightened."

"I can well understand that, but I think, as you have a brother——"

"None now, sir."

"But you spoke of one just now."

"He is dead, sir," replied the girl, reddening even to her forehead.

"Ah, so you have learnt this since?"

"Yes, sir."

"To-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"So that this man doubly deceived you?"

"Yes, sir," responded she, weeping.

"Hence, you have no more kinsfolk?" went on Elson.

"No, sir, I am alone in the world. On landing at San Francisco, after my passage had been paid, there remained to me but fifteen dollars for the whole of my worldly possessions. I was obliged to give them to a woman who helped me to escape from that house."

The flush of shame overspread the speaker's visage, while she thus revealed the painful secret of her wretchedness, and large tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Do not take this so to heart," consolingly said the American. "We will put you in a way of earning your livelihood without your being beholden to anybody."

"Oh, sir, how can I thank you for what you have done for me?"

"Do not let us speak of it. It is something which you can requite here after. What do you know how to do?"

"A little of everything. In the days when my poor father was rich, he had a good education given me. I know how to sew, embroider, draw in some slight degree, and, without being anything uncommon, I could at need give lessons on the piano. I can speak German, Spanish, English, and a little French."

"Is there any particular employment which you would prefer?"

"I would willingly give lessons of music and design——"

"Such gifts would go begging here," said Elson, shaking his head, "you are too young and by far too attractive to pursue such a calling in a city like San Francisco. I have an idea. Do you know how, and are you willing, to work for a dress-maker?"

"Oh, yes, sir! should you find me a place in a shop——"

"Too many inconveniences are consequent upon that," replied Elson. "It will be better for work to be given you for you to do at home."

"No one would ever trust me, sir."

"I think that it can be done, I will attend to it."

He went out without listening to her thanks, and went to a merchant to whom he had a letter of credit.

He explained to him what he wanted, and asked him if he knew of any dress-maker.

"Why," responded the man, "there was one just left me this very instant, but I will take very good care not to give you a letter for her."

"Why so?"

"I have here for her a box of trim-

mings, fresh from Paris, but with an express recommendation not to deliver without collection."

"Well?"

"To get the box, she will have to come down with eleven hundred dollars, and, as she did not have them, she flounced out in a rage."

"Suppose I advance the eleven hundred dollars?"

"I do not doubt that she will pay it back—but it's a risk to run."

"I am not speaking of that. Do you think she will give my friend work?"

"I should think so. You can make the conditions."

"I would rather not appear in the transaction. Will you do me the favor of taking the business on yourself?"

"With the utmost pleasure; what is her name?"

"Martha Dietrich," replied Elson, who gave at the same time to the merchant other requisite details.

That same evening, the importer wrote to the young man that the affair was arranged, and that he had settled upon very advantageous conditions in favor of Miss Dietrich, representing her as a friend of his.

Elson hastened to impart the good news to Martha.

On the following day she went for work to Mrs. Miller, the dress-maker, who received her most graciously.

From that day forward, Martha set to work in earnest.

She was very nimble in fingers, and worked with admirable neatness.

From morning to dusk, she was continually by the window of a little room which the American had selected for her.

Thanks to her labor, Martha was enabled, in less than three weeks, to reimburse to Mr. Elson all he had advanced.

He received them without any remarks, as something he had relied upon having.

Henceforward she felt more at ease with respect to him, her reception of him became more cordial and warmer, from the day when the young man could not see any calculation in her evidences of acknowledgement.

No one better than he could feel and appreciate all these delicacies.

From this concentration of mind upon Martha, he had concluded by arriving at an ability to read the girl's face as an open book.

Every day, he valued higher the bewitching qualities of the girl, so sad, yet so courageous, whom he viewed grow up again, as it were, beneath his eyes, notwithstanding the too steady and prolonged labor with which she would proceed.

Often he would have prevented her continuing to weary herself thus, but she entreated him to let her keep on.

"Give me time to lay up a little money," she would say; "only enough to live a month or two in case of sickness. If you only knew how afraid I am of ever falling back into the detestable situation in which I was when you saved me!"

"Am I not still here?"

"You may not be always. Besides," she added, smiling, "it seems to me that, if you ever become my banker again, our friendship would not be on the same footing."

Faithful to the law which he had traced out to show to Miss Dietrich all the greater respect to prevent her thinking he held her to be in an inferior position, Elson dared never to carry to his lips the pretty hand which was let fall in his; but his eyes so plainly expressed his wish and his fear, that Martha was touched to the heart.

Her embarrassment was communicated to Mr. Elson

Both remained for several instants in a silence which they knew not how to break.

At length, Francis Elson muttered something about business, and went out.

Instead of going home, he spent half the day in roaming over the country.

While promising himself only to call on Martha Dietrich from time to time, he spent a good portion of the day there.

This came on insensibly.

It began by his presenting himself every second day; then, every day; then, twice a-day.

Gradually, his visits, while becoming more frequent, were prolonged.

At the commencement, he found different pretexts and motives; then he used to come as a matter of course, without ever speaking of what brought him.

He would enter, press Martha's hand, and watch her work, while conversing of one thing or another.

Sometimes, he would read to her.

Time thus rolled on with a rapidity with which Francis was surprised when he had to retire.

Hardly would he be gone, when Martha would reproach herself for tolerating visits so long and frequent.

She would promise to speak to Elson the first time he should appear, but she would forget her resolve, or find a score of reasons to defer its execution.

A day came when habit had grown so deeply rooted as to prevent her dreaming of it, for fear of being compelled to confess that she had not the force to renounce it.

To be just, we must state that any mother might have overheard the conversation of the young couple, without finding a word to quibble at.

Elson gave Martha the best advice, and never did he seek to address to her, not a word of love, but a simple gallantry.

Still he looked upon her considerably, and, while keeping her eyes cast down upon her work, Martha thought too much perhaps of the light hair and bright eyes of her friend.

One day, Francis came in to Miss Dietrich with an air both delighted and embarrassed.

"What's the matter with you?" inquired the girl, who easily divined Elson's thoughts upon his visage.

After much hesitation, he finally confessed that he had bought a piano for her, and that he did not know how to offer it to her.

Although deeply affected, less by the present than by Elson's embarrassment, Miss Dietrich refused it.

He timidly insisted.

"Listen," said he; "there is more selfishness in this than you can dream of. You know how much I like music. It will be great pleasure to me to hear you play a few pieces. Whenever anything makes me heavy of heart—and you know you have reproached me for it—there is nothing which can soothe me so well. You must have noticed this more than once already."

"Well, have it so," she said at last; "I accept the piano, but as a loan merely, and I will pay you so much a month towards buying it."

"But then you will not be able to lay aside any money."

"I shall always have the value of the piano; at need, you can take it back from me at cost."

"Yes; but suppose I am not here?"

"True," she said.

She became fearfully pale, and her tremulous fingers made her needle miss the proper place.

"Are you thinking of departure?" she asked after an instant's silence.

"No, certainly not."

"Still you mean, some day or another, to go back to the States?"

"Why should I? I am an orphan



like yourself, and owe an account of my actions to no one. I am happy here, and will remain here."

Martha, who had lifted up her eyes to read the speaker's face, lowered her head precipitately, but not quickly enough, however, to conceal her heightened color and the flash of joy which shone in her eyes.

"Well," said she, delighted in turn to be able to give the young man a moment's joy, "send me the instrument. I have just eighty dollars laid by; here are fifty for my first payment, and I will give you ten more a-month."

"That is settled," rejoined the enchanted Elson.

On the same evening, the piano was installed in Miss Dietrich's room.

She was passionately fond of music, and it was a great source of pleasure to her.

On the first day, despite all her self-remonstrances and her desire to work, she twenty times threw down her needle to run to the piano.

Not to entrench upon her labors, she imposed upon herself a law to play only in the evening after nine o'clock; this only took her two or three hours from her duties; but she would often try to make up for this in the morning, without confessing it to Mr. Elson, who had thought of the instrument with an idea to relieve her of a little of the work which he had found too much for the girl's strength.

Every day, also, she played with Francis, who had much musical power, and who profited by this practice to give the girl lessons.

Elson's happiest moments were those he spent thus, from eight to ten of the evening, beside Miss Dietrich.

Seated in the shadowy part of the chamber, he would listen to the girl playing and would contemplate her in full liberty.

When ten o'clock came, he would go and sit by Martha, and the two would converse for half an hour more; then, he would shake the girl's hand and go home.

When he had gone, Martha would hide behind her curtains to follow him with her eyes along the street, and, her ear on the stretch, would listen anxiously to the sound of the steps gradually growing fainter.

Although the police was beginning to be regulated in San Francisco, there were many crimes still committed.

Martha continually feared that Mr. Elson would be murdered while traversing the city at such an advanced hour of the night.

One time, when the darkness was very intense and the rain falling in torrents, Francis left Miss Dietrich.

He had taken advantage of the bad weather to remain along with her somewhat longer than usual.

And besides, at the moment of departure, he had delayed to keep Martha's hand longer in his.

Hidden in the curtains, the girl listened to his departing footsteps.

As Francis did not live far from her house, Martha could hear him in the still night almost till he had entered his hotel.

In two or three minutes more, the sound of the steps would have died away.

Suddenly, the listener heard a shot of pistol or revolver from the spot where Mr. Elson was likely to be.

A second and a third report followed the first.

Instantly the rapid steps of a man running sounded dull, yet plain on the muddy soil of the deserted streets.

"Francis has been waylaid and murdered!" thought Martha.

In the first outburst of her emotion,

she caught up a light pocket revolver which Mr. Elson had purchased for her, hurriedly ran down the stairs, and resolutely prepared to rush out into the street.

At the moment when she turned to close the door after her, a hand seized her arm.

She gave a scream.

"Hush!" said the stranger.

"You?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, open quickly!"

Bewildered, she opened.

"Where are you going?" cried the stranger, seeing that she was preparing to move away.

"A man has just been killed," she stammered, "at least, I want to see if—"

"Pooh, I didn't kill him," the man returned sullenly, "it was he rather who came pretty near sending me to the devil. I've only wounded him; but if we meet again, I'll cut the young cock's comb! Come, come in! If this door is seen open it will get us into trouble."

He pushed her before him, and hastened to shut the door.

Meanwhile, Elson had gained his hotel, after having reloaded the barrels of his revolver.

It was he, indeed, who had fired.

Two or three hundred paces from his lodging, he had been attacked unawares by a man, who had sprang out upon him and dealt him a stab with a knife.

Luckily, the weapon had slipped to one side off from Elson's wet overcoat.

As nobody went unarmed in San Francisco at this period, and as Elson was no objection to the rule, he had immediately replied by a shot from his revolver, and had rushed on his assailant.

The latter had taken to his heels, but turning abruptly he had fired a shot at the American, which the want of light had caused to miss.

Guided by the sound of the fugitive's heavy boots, Francis had discharged in that direction, a second revolver shot of which he could not see the result.

Then seeing the danger and uselessness of pursuit in the gloom, he had entered his hotel.

Although his wound was not very deep, as we have said, the knife had glanced and its force had been weakened by the thickness of his coat, he was obliged to take the arm of a waiter to go up to his room, situated on the first floor.

A surgeon was sent for, but he was too busy and could not come till the next day.

When he did come, he dressed the cut, and said that he did not think it dangerous, but that it would be a great while before it healed.

When the surgeon had gone, Francis, who had been forbidden to move, broke the order by writing a few lines to Miss Dietrich.

He told her that he had been slightly hurt by an accident, and that it would be several days before he would be able to visit her.

The man who took this note happened to be the very same waiter who had, the night before, helped Mr. Elson up to his room.

He had been startled by the sight of the wound, for the point of the dagger, running along a rib, had ploughed up the skin over a considerable space and had made a very frightful cut in appearance.

When Miss Dietrich questioned him on the state of the injured American, this man could not help shaking his head in a very significant fashion, and telling what he had seen.

As always happens in such cases, Martha still more exaggerated the whole thinking the man was kindly deceiving her, and that Francis was in a dying condition.

She took up her bonnet and shawl, and descended with the messenger.

In a few minutes afterwards, she was in Elson's room.

"You here!" he exclaimed, with an accent of gladness and surprise.

She took his hand, and burst into tears.

"Are you astonished to see me grateful?" she responded, trying to smile through her tears.

"No, heaven be my witness that I am not astonished! But how is it you have the courage to come thus into a young man's apartments? Believe me that I am thankful to you from the depths of my heart; but I fear for you—"

"What matters that?" she cried, with an outburst in which was revealed her mother's Mexican blood; "what of that! If the loss of my reputation is the only sacrifice by which I can prove my gratitude, rest assured I do so with all my heart."

Francis took Martha's hand, and pressed it, saying simply:

"Thank you, Miss Martha!"

But the tone in which he uttered the words was worth all the speeches in the world.

Miss Dietrich sat down by the wounded man's bedside, and declared that she was going to be his nurse.

This proposition, which would make any one smile in another country if asserted to be a great proof of affection, was strongly to be noted in San Francisco, where for money attentions could not be bought.

Money did not get everything in these days.

Supposing—something not certain—that a nurse could be found, she would have to be paid her weight in gold, while there were ninety-nine chances against one that they would alight upon some disreputable character, in whose hands the purse, and perhaps the life of the wounded man would be exposed.

Through a sentiment of delicacy easily understood, Francis combatted Miss Dietrich's plan for some time; but, really this project made him very happy.

During a week, Martha kept faithful company to the wounded man, whose convalescence progressed with all the more rapidity from his not having been in reality dangerously wounded.

At last, he obtained permission to rise and to spend the greater part of the day in an easy chair.

Then Martha would sit near him in another chair, her work in her hand, and converse with the American.

Sometimes she would read to him.

At others, she would sing his favorite songs.

For several days, already, Francis had obtained permission to walk about his apartment.

Then the doctor announced to him that he could go out.

Never did invalid receive with less delight news usually so wished for by the ears of a convalescent.

When Miss Dietrich came at her habitual hour, Francis announced the doctor's decision to her with an air so lugubrious that she began laughing, although she had no more gladness in her heart than the young man in his.

The two had too full a bosom now to be in the humor for conversing.

Martha sat down at the piano and commenced Weber's Last Thought, one of the selections most to Elson's taste.

In the very finest part of the piece, some one gave a sounding knock at the door.

Hosmer entered the room.

On perceiving Miss Dietrich, he stopped short in amazement.

He bowed awkwardly, without power to suppress a smile, of which the girl plainly enough guessed the significance.



Then he hastened to Elson, who came to him, forcing himself to receive his friend most heartily to conceal his true vexation.

"How are you? have you come around?" cried Hosmer, shaking the hand Francis held out to him. "I am just come from Sutter's Fort. My first visit is this to you. I was lately informed of your accident; but I see gladly that you are already cured. Oh, my dear fellow, what a horrid country this is! Didn't I tell you so?"

Although keenness of observation was not his strong point, the fat Englishman was not slow to perceive that he was one too many.

He made an excuse about business, and took leave of his friend and Miss Dietrich.

The latter was going to retire at the moment Hosmer had withdrawn, but Francis whispered to her:

"Remain, I beg you."

She did remain; but, instead of opening a conversation, she had gone to sit at the piano as if to resume a sheet of music.

When Francis returned to the chamber, which he had left to see his friend out, he found Martha in tears.

She precipitately dried her eyes, and feigned to be very busy with the sheet of music, a single note of which the poor thing's swimming eyes could not decipher at that moment.

Francis regarded her for an instant in silence from the middle of the room; then he stepped up to her.

"Martha!" he said softly.

She meant to reply; but she felt that at the first words her tears would outpour.

She turned her head aside as if she had not heard.

Then Francis came to kneel beside her, and took her hand.

"Martha," he began again, "do you remember how, on the first day when you were here, you took my hand as I now have taken yours? Do you recollect also what you replied when I made you remark that your presence by me would be wrongly interpreted? Tell me, Martha, do you call this to mind?"

She nodded.

"You see how right I was," he said, "and this is what makes you weep."

"I am not weeping," she answered, biting her lips to stifle her sobs.

"Do you regret what you have done, Martha?"

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed.

"Well, Martha, you are right; for, now that you have restored me to health, it encourages me to ask of you something far more precious; the happiness of my whole life. I love you, Martha, love you with all the strength, all the respect of my soul! Martha, will you be my wife?"

"I your wife!" she repeated, turning to the young man her beautiful face flooded with tears; "I?"

"Yes, Martha, yes, my well-beloved, you, who have torn me from those sad thoughts of isolation to which I was giving way; you, whom I love, in a word. Tell me, Martha, will you complete your work, and give me forever that hand which I press in my own at this thrice-blessed moment?"

"Your wife?" reiterated Miss Dietrich, with a transport of rapture, of acknowledgement and love, which made Elson's heart rejoice.

But, all of a sudden, her radiant face grew clouded, and only expressed deep despair.

"What ails you?" cried Francis.

"Wretched creature that I am!" said she, covering her face with both hands, "I cannot wed you!"

"Cannot!" echoed the young man, in

consternation; "wherefore not, oh, heaven!"

"Do not ask me, Francis. This union is impossible."

"Is it my fortune that stands in the way? Do you fear to accept what the world may look upon as a sacrifice? What do you think?"

"In heaven's name, Francis, do not question me! You will kill me!"

"Martha!"

"Let me go," she said faintly, repulsing the young man kneeling before her.

Making an effort over herself, Martha rose with tottering step.

She trembling took up with one hand her bonnet and shawl, and moved towards the door.

"Farewell, friend," said she to the stupefied Elson. "Let me go—this must be. For mercy's sake, ask me nothing. You would drive me mad—good-bye!"

She held out her hand to Francis without looking at him, and went out hastily.

Painfully astounded by the girl's singular refusal, Francis passed the rest of the day in cudgelling his brain to divine the motive.

In the evening, unable to withstand the promptings of his heart, he presented himself at Miss Dietrich's rooms.

On seeing him she held out her hand.

"Forgive me for having afflicted you," she said to him; "but if you only knew what I have suffered! I have vowed never more to see you—alas! I feel that this resolve is beyond my strength. I ask of you only your promise; it is never again to return to the subject you have spoken to me."

"Martha!"

"This must be, Mr. Elson, I vow to you that it must, if you will not make this promise to me, I will have to go: go, I know not where; but I have not the power to undergo a second time what I have suffered this morning. Give me your word, or we see one another to-day for the last time."

"Yes, you have it," sadly replied Francis; "but now you promise me to let me speak on the day when the obstacle parting us shall have disappeared."

She shook her head sorrowfully.

"I ought not even to leave you that hope," said she. "This obstacle will exist always. Poor Francis!" added she, tendering her hand in emotion to the young man, whose features expressed the most heartfelt pain, "why did you and I meet?"

Then with an action full of passionate thankfulness, she carried the young man's hand to her lips.

"The will of heaven be done!" said he re-animating by this caress. "There is left to me at least the bliss of seeing and hearing you."

From that day forward they resumed their former lodgings, but the remembrance of the last interview which they had had in Elson's chamber threw constantly a sort of fetter upon their relations.

At every instant, Francis, was on the point of speaking of his love, and, albeit his mouth kept the pledged silence, his eyes had not kept the same faithfulness.

Elson received from time to time visits from his friend Hosmer.

The latter was wrapped up in three or four speculations and consequently was very busy.

He frequently asked after Miss Dietrich, but Francis avoided as much as possible, this subject of conversation.

Five or six days after the recovery of Francis, he was astonished to find Martha's door fastened when he presented himself at his accustomed hour.

He went back there a couple of hours afterwards, but he could not get in any more than the first time.

As he returned much troubled in mind to his hotel, a waiter stepped up to him and said that Miss Dietrich had told him to announce that she was forced to be absent and that she would not be home till very late.

Francis did not know what to do with himself all day.

He rowed about the wharfs, puzzling himself with endeavors to guess what had become of Martha.

At times, terrible suspicions would rack his brain.

He would repel them immediately, but still that did not prevent their returning to torment him.

Without being aware of it, the young man returned to the street where dwelt the girl.

When two o'clock in the morning rang out from the bells of the missions, he found himself once more in the neighborhood of Martha's house, with his eyes fixed upon the windows, which he could scarcely distinguish in the gloom.

While he was thus standing motionless, absorbed in his musings, three men slipped softly up to him, and caught hold of his arms.

In a twinkling, he was secured beyond possibility of moving.

"What do you want?" he asked, while one of the aggressors poured the light from a bull's-eye lantern upon him. "If you want my purse, take it, but let me go."

"Your purse!" said one of the men, angrily. "Do you take us for birds of your own feather?"

"That is not the man," remarked another.

"Yes, he is, Murray," said the third.

"No, no," resumed the second; "the *desperado* is not so tall and is of browner complexion. This one does not come near the description."

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" asked one of them abruptly of Mr. Elson.

"First, tell me with whom I am speaking?" rejoined he haughtily.

"We are members of the Vigilance Committee," answered one of the two, "and are after a criminal who has taken refuge somewhere about here."

Francis thereupon gave his name and address.

"Why, I know the gentleman," all at once broke in an upholsterer, who happened to be in the number of the volunteer aguazils. "He is a New Yorker, who lives in the Crown Hotel. I sold him a sofa only day before yesterday. I beg your pardon for what has happened to you, Mr. Elson," proceeded he to his customer, "but we could not guess it was you. We are acting for the good of all honest people."

The speaker was right, and Francis could not do anything more or less than laugh at his misadventure.

Left to himself, he was about to go to his lodging, when, at the moment when he was passing Martha's house, he heard the low sound of a door opened cautiously.

His heart leaped violently.

By a movement on which he had not reflected, he fell back to the wall behind some empty barrels, and held his breath.

Thus he was hardly two yards from the door opening, which was none other than Miss Dietrich's.

"Well?" whispered a masculine voice.

"There's nobody to be seen; you can go forth," answered a female, the sound of whose tones sent a thrill through Elson's veins.

Then a man, well enwrapped in an ample brown cloak, stepped out with precaution, flinging around him a suspicious look.

Thanks to the shadow which was projected upon the watcher by the objects



behind which he had found concealment, the stranger passed without perceiving him.

Suddenly, whether the man fancied he saw something or had an instinctive suspicion, he started and half turned to retrace his steps.

But he checked the movement and resumed his way.

As for Francis, he had been so painfully affected by Martha's treachery, that he did not even clap his hand to his revolver on seeing the stranger about to approach.

The latter moved away noiselessly.

At the end of a couple of minutes, there arose shouts and several detonations of fire-arms.

Then the cloaked man rushed by Elson, running with all the power of his legs and stopping before the door of Martha's house.

"Open quick! it is I, Martha!" said the man breathlessly. "I am pursued."

Miss Dietrich had no doubt remained on watch in the entry, for the door opened instantly and quickly closed after the fugitive.

A few seconds afterwards, five or six men came up running, and threw themselves upon Francis, who was just coming out of his place of observation.

"You again!" they cried. "Tell us, sir, you must have seen a man pass you just now, one who must certainly have taken refuge somewhere here. Into which house did he go?"

"I did not see him," answered Elson.

"You must have seen him; our friends guard the other end of the street and this man could not have passed them. He must be in one of these houses."

"And here's one with the door ajar," said one of the men, pointing to the door of Martha's house, which had been left unclosed by her agitated hand. "This is it."

"No!" said Francis; "the man went on farther. If he went in anywhere, it was about the third house of the block. What crime has he committed?"

"What crime? what crimes, caramba!" exclaimed a Mexican in answer. "He is the desperado, the leader of the robbers who infest San Francisco, who murder so many honest men every night."

"Ah!" said Elson, thunder-stricken by the idea that she whom he loved so much was the light-o'-love of an assassin.

"Hark ye, gentlemen," said he who appeared to be the leader of the party, "the desperado can only be in one or the other of the three houses. Let us search first the one this gentleman has pointed out to us, and post sentinels before the others, waiting till we visit them also."

They hastened to carry out his proposition.

While the posts were being settled, Francis entered Martha's house.

The upholsterer, who happened to be the one on watch there, being the same who had sold to the young man the furniture for Miss Dietrich, naturally supposed Francis some flame of hers, and did not dream of stopping him.

Elson briskly ran up to Martha's room, and tapped at the door.

No answer came.

"I am Francis Elson," said the young man, putting his lips to the keyhole. "I know that you are here with the desperado. The house is going to be searched; I came to save him. Open; you have not a minute to lose."

Francis heard a low whispering inside.

At length, steps approached the door. It was opened.

By the glimmer of a small night-lamp, Francis perceived the man in the cloak standing beside Martha, and surveying the new-comer with a distrustful air.

Without glancing at Miss Dietrich, whose features showed shame and despair, Francis explained to the man the measures taken for his capture.

"They shall not have me alive!" muttered the stranger in a ferocious tone.

"Hark ye," resumed Elson, "take my cloak and hat."

The two exchanged their outer articles of dress.

"Now," said the New Yorker, "go down and cross the street quietly. The man at the door watching now is one who will take you for me, and you can escape without difficulty."

"Who guarantees to me that this is not a trap you're setting for me?" said salteador in a suspicious tone.

"I, Joseph!" cried Martha.

"You?"

"Yes; Mr. Elson is truth itself."

"What can be the motive of a man rich and prosperous like you in protecting a man like me?" growled the salteador.

"I do not like your being killed here," answered the American simply.

"Thank you, none the less, for your interest," said the desperado. "We shall see one another again. Good-bye, Martha."

He bowed to the American and stalked out, not without dignity.

Francis sat down on a chair.

Martha opened the window slightly, and waited for the departure of the desperado.

Soon they heard the latter open the door and go out.

The sentinel took a couple of steps toward him; but, probably recognizing Mr. Elson's dress, he returned to his former post.

Presently, the bandit's steps died away.

Then Martha closed the window, and came to kneel down before Mr. Elson.

"Forgive me," said she, taking his hand. "If you could know—"

"Leave me!" cried he, rising and starting back suddenly as though the soft hand had been a red-hot iron.

The poor girl bowed her head on the cushions of the sofa, doing her best to conceal and stifle her sobs, but these were betrayed by the convulsive heavings of her shoulders.

"Listen," said Francis without looking at her, "I remain here, because I must leave that man time to go away. But if you say anything to me, if you speak one word—on my honor, I will go down immediately, at the risk of whatever may happen to me or to that desperado."

Martha lifted her eyes heavenward, as if to ask heaven to have mercy on her, and remained in that position, her head leaning against the cushions of the sofa.

In a few minutes, several persons knocked heavily on the street door.

Some one in the house opened to them.

Five or six men, armed to the teeth, came up the stairs, examining every room in the house.

As they had taken care to explain that they were in search of the dreaded robber and cut-throat whom everybody feared in San Francisco, every door was opened to them without very much resistance.

"Aha!" muttered one of the men, on seeing Francis in Miss Dietrich's room, "here is our young bird! Scheider was right, no wonder he mounts guard over so pretty a girl."

Martha blushed to the whites of her eyes, and covered her face with her hands.

Francis had not heard the remark.

When the members of the Vigilance Committee had concluded their inspection, Elson took his hat and went out with them.

As he was about closing the door, Martha sprang to him.

"In heaven's name, Mr. Elson!" she began.

He waved her back, and without looking at her shut the door.

On returning to his hotel, Francis made preparations for changing his lodgings.

At ten o'clock in the morning, he left the Hotel of the Crown without leaving his new address, and installed himself in another part of the city.

Three days passed.

They were as many centuries to the young man.

Accustomed to spend nearly his whole time near Martha, he did not know what to do with himself.

A vacancy was around him as there was one in his heart.

He no longer felt desires or hope, but let himself glide into that apathy of grief which follow crises.

He fell ill finally, and spent three weeks in a state bordering on death.

Happily for him, his stout friend Hosmer, had contrived to discover his address.

He was of great comfort and help to the sick man who, in his disregard of life, would not have given himself the trouble to ask for a physician.

When Elson could go out, a lingering trace of former habits and, it may be, the secret leaning of his heart drew him towards the house in which Miss Dietrich had dwelt.

What cruel thoughts he must have felt when gazing on the casements of that little room, in which he had passed the brightest hours of his life.

One day, he could hold out no longer.

He inquired whether Miss Dietrich resided there any longer.

He was answered that she had been gone for close upon a month.

The owner of the house, a woman who lived in the basement, recognized Mr. Elson and said to him eagerly:

"How glad I am to see you, sir! On going, Miss Dietrich left a letter for you. We sent it to you at your hotel, but they could not give us your address."

"What has become of the letter?" inquired Francis, his heart leaping violently.

"I will go for it, sir. It is in my bureau."

"If you will give me the key at the same time," said Elson, "I will go up to the room, which I will hire of you on the same conditions as Miss Dietrich, if that suits you."

"But, sir, rents are going up, and then, too, it is nearly time for a new ship to arrive from the States."

"How much do you want for the room, in brief?" asked Francis, who with difficulty constrained his impatience.

"Sixty dollars, sir, and only because it is you, and that I would be delighted to have such a respectable lodger as you."

"Here's twenty dollars advance; I will send you the rest to-night. Now, give me the key and the letter."

After having received these two objects, he went up into Martha's chamber, and double-locked the door.

Although fifty times a-day he would repeat that he harbored against the girl nothing less than scorn, Elson loved her as well as in the past, and, perchance, better, for he felt that he could not live without her.

Thus ran the letter:

"Pardon me for daring to write to you, Mr. Francis. It is the last time Martha will importune you. Do not destroy my letter; if you were aware of all I suffered on that night, I swear to you that you would have pity on me."

"This letter, besides you may look



upon as the last farewell of one about to die. In a few hours, I am to start with my brother for an expedition from which I truly hope never to return—"

"Her brother!" muttered the reader in a tremulous voice; "only a brother!"

Then his eyes lighted upon the ensuing lines:

"Heaven has punished me most cruelly for having concealed the truth from you, Mr. Francis. I loved you too much—I can tell you this, now that we are parted for evermore. I knew that, on learning that I was the sister of a salteador, you would shun me. I had not the courage to endure such an abandonment."

"You do not know, Mr. Elson, what the scorn of one you love is."

"Before the heaven hearing me, I swear to you that the most frightful tortures appeared to me less poignant than the look of anger and of contempt under which you crushed me when you left me."

"That look I still see, Mr. Elson; it still weighs like lead upon my poor heart. I have been very guilty towards you, it is true; but I was so unhappy! I feel that I ought to renounce the bliss of seeing you any more; but I still wish to obtain your pardon, and receive, at the moment of our everlasting separation, one of those hearty shakes of the hand which have been my only joy, my sole consolation in the midst of the sorrows which were caused me by my brother's mode of life. He, also, is very guilty! and yet, Mr. Elson, God may see some extenuation, in His goodness, for the kind of fate—in due reverence I say it—which seems to have urged him along the path of crime."

"I do not try to justify him in your eyes."

"Wherefore should I? you would not believe me; but I assure you he is worthy of compassion."

"My misfortune, at least, has had for him a good result."

"On beholding the disdain and misfortune into which his conduct has plunged me, he vowed to leave the criminal existence for which he was not born."

"At this juncture, an expedition is being formed to deliver some miners whom an association had sent to the diggings, where they were captured by the Apaches with all their implements. Some United States dragoons are to be the nucleus of the enterprise. Everybody believes that it will fail, and that we will suffer the same fate as those whom we mean to try to rescue."

"This is what has decided my brother and I in becoming part of it."

"His death will blot out his misdeeds: mine will free me from a sorrow bearing upon me with a force beyond my strength to support it."

"I cannot live without seeing you, Francis!"

"At this very moment, did I know where to find you, I would brave your scorn to drag myself to your feet and to crave of you mercy and pity for a poor girl who loves you as a man never before was loved!"

"Farewell, Mr. Francis, farewell! may you be happy, most happy! All my prayers are for you! Forget me, for you have told me you loved me."

"I remember the day, good, dear, Frank, when you proposed to wed me!"

"At least, do not forget I was so just as to refuse you! Alas! that does not absolve me for having deceived you; I know it but too well—I must stop."

"Meseems in closing this letter, that I part from you another time."

"Farewell; my brother has charged me to tell you that he will employ the single means which heaven has left to

him to show to you his acknowledgment."

"Instead of living as a bandit, he will be slain as an honest man. He has retaken his name, our real name, that of Helling. I did not venture to tell you this before—you can account for the reason."

"Once more, farewell, Mr. Francis! good-bye to that humble chamber into which you so often—none to often came—I was so happy there, yes, very happy! Be blessed for your goodness and your love."

"However unworthy I may have been of your affection, don't blush for it, Mr. Francis. It has been the sole enjoyment of my life, and the sun does not regret the ray so bright and gladdening that it has cast upon an atom of dust."

"Farewell, Francis."

"If ever you should return to that chamber—and something tells me that you will visit it—say to yourself that once there dwelt within it a poor girl very unfortunate, who loved you with all her soul, and who would have let her blood flow drop by drop, if that would earn her the bliss of being permitted to become worthy of you."

Francis stopped a hundred times before he reach the end of this perusal.

Tears flooded his face, and prevented him seeing clearly.

In the opening days of his love for Martha, he would have probably been distracted to learn that she was the sister of a robber.

But now, after a month of jealousy and despair, Elson's breast bounded with joy at the thought that Martha still loved him.

He read, re-read, yet read, and read again the gladdening characters, covering them with tears and kisses.

Suddenly, an idea surged upon his brain.

He snatched up the paper and sought for the date.

It was written more than three weeks back.

"Good heavens!" he groaned, "if Martha started on that day, she is far, far from here now. Yet I must find her."

An hour after this, he was in full search in San Francisco, to gain intelligence concerning the expedition of which Miss Helling and her brother were to form a part.

He was at first unsuccessful.

His good genius inspired him to go and see his friend Hosmer.

He found the latter in the midst of boxes, bundles, barrels, etc., settling prices, paying truckmen, and calculating expenditures.

Francis explained to him what he wanted.

"Don't let me trouble you too much," said he.

"It's no trouble at all," replied Hosmer, and then, rubbing his hands, he cried:

"I never knew of such luck!"

"What do you mean?"

"My dear fellow," responded the jovial Englishman, "I am just sending provisions to this very same party."

"No?" said Elson, hardly believing his ears.

"And what's more," pursued Hosmer, "I mean to go with my goods myself."

"When?"

"In a fortnight."

"I cannot wait so long as that. I must go to-night."

"But you have nothing ready."

"What of that?"

"Oh, these Yankees!" exclaimed Hosmer.

"No, no," said Elson laughing, "only a New Yorker."

"Come, come, give me a week or eight days, and I will go with you."

"I cannot."

"Two days."

"If you only knew in what an agitated state I am."

"It shall not be said that I let you go off alone. My clerk shall buy up the provisions."

"That's settled, then."

Hosmer gave an expressive wink.

He was a man who felt deep friendship for his young acquaintance.

He hastened to make the indispensable preparatives, which Elson's feverish impatience hardly left him time to complete.

On the forthcoming day, Elson, accompanied by his friend, started to overtake Martha.

All that he had heard from men, competent judges, upon the perils of the expedition and on the sad fate, in all likelihood, reserved for those composing it, doubled Elson's fears and his eagerness to rejoin Miss Helling.

As often happens in such cases, the more haste the less speed. Elson's too great precipitation only delayed him.

In half wild countries such as California was at this epoch, it was very important that a traveler should start on a journey provided with every necessary.

Now, Francis had forgotten, or neglected, what his guides had advised him to take, but which he had not liked to wait for before his departure.

Scarcely was he on the road, than too well was seen the evil effect of such omission.

To give an idea of the importance of the minutest article, let us only state that, on account of a few nails that had been forgotten, the little train was delayed for several days.

The course was taken of keeping on a-foot.

Upheld by the impatience which devoured him, Elson fancied that everybody else was like him, and his little escort had much ado to keep up with him.

Instead of catching up to the first expedition, they lost ground.

The privations, the vicissitudes and dangers which they had to support were regarded by Elson as a mere nothing.

In the midst of the most serious perils, he never thought but of the delay which it occasioned.

To make up for this, Mr. Hosmer was in a perpetual torment.

His only relief and occupation was the cooking of some savory dish with the few pieces of game which he and Elson shot on the way, but his unwearied companion would hardly ever give him time to digest peaceably the results of his culinary labors.

One day, among others, the luckless Hosmer had to leave, to resume the march, a luscious *totemada* of buffalo hump, with which he was promising himself a fine feast.

This day he could hold in no longer, he revolted.

But, on seeing a tear roll from his friend's eye, as Elson resigned himself to wait, the feeling man forgot his palate, heaved a deep sigh, took up his belt one hole farther and set out forthwith with Elson, who shook his hand in mute gratitude.

Protected doubtlessly by the god said to watch over lovers, Francis at length did overtake the little body composed for the expedition.

He came "a day too late for the fair."

He arrived at the time when his countrymen had just recovered some of the captives, after a bloody engagement with the Apaches.

The Indians had been soundly flogged; but still, they had inflicted considerable loss on their victorious enemy.



Not to reveal to everybody the motive which led him, and the interest he bore for Martha, it was not for her, but for her brother that Francis inquired of the first persons he met.

"Joseph Helling?" repeated a lieutenant of the dragoons to whom the New Yorker had put the question. "You will have to make haste, sir, if you wish to see him."

"Why, what has happened to him?" breathlessly asked Elson.

"He is cut up with wounds."

"So he fought well?"

"I should say so! He killed the chief of the Apaches, and rescued Corporal Sullivan of our company, and we regulars confess that we owe our success to him. We lose an invaluable soldier in him."

"Where is he?"

"Yonder, under that little tent, at the door of which you see several persons. Everybody feels great interest in him, poor fellow! True, he has rendered us great service."

Francis hastened to the designated place.

Hardly had he entered the tent than he saw Joseph extended on a wretched blanket, and covered with blood.

Beside him was Martha, who held on her knees her brother's head.

The regimental surgeon, or rather the surgeon to a company, for that title was a true one for that skeleton of a force, had just gone out, shaking his head to the inquiries of those who asked about the wounded man.

On seeing the two strangers, Elson and Hosmer, the two or three persons in the tent turned abruptly.

Alone, buried in her sorrow, Martha did not stir.

Notwithstanding his weak state, the wounded man recognized Francis and gently touched his sister's arm.

"Mr. Elson!" said he; "look."

The poor girl lifted her head and remained as if petrified.

Her countenance revealed so clearly what was going on in her heart that Francis burst into tears.

Had there not been so many eyes upon him, he would have fallen at her feet.

"Welcome, Mr. Elson," said the injured man in a faint voice. "Heaven is kind in having conducted you here at this moment. You see that I have kept my promise. I die a soldier's death—they will all tell you that I tried to do my duty. At my last hour, I thank you for having allowed me to thus purchase my past life."

Too much affected to speak, Francis put out his hand, which Joseph squeezed with the little strength left to him.

"I thank you, sir, I thank you," proceeded he with emotion, "I did not dare to ask you this."

"Forget what has been," said Francis, contemplating with pain the thin, wearied features of Martha; "we will cure you, and I will take you back with me." Helling shook his head.

"My days are numbered," said he; "speaking truly, were I allowed to prolong them, I would refuse to do it. I have been guilty, Mr. Elson, but I have also been very unfortunate. Twice, I have been unjustly despoiled of my fortune. I have been hunted for a deed of which I was innocent."

"A wretch, whom I snatched from death and cared for and cherished like an own brother, accused me of a murder which had been committed by the very son of the judge who sentenced me. I slew the liar, then the judge so faithless to his duty; blood calls for blood, crime engenders crime, and I became—"

"Enough," interrupted Francis, "you will tire yourself. We can talk hereafter. Now, take rest."

"Do not try to deceive me," resumed Joseph; "before an hour will have passed, I will be dead, I well know. Let me use this moment when we are alone—for everybody else is gone, I think?"

"They have gone, my friend," replied Elson.

It fact, except Helling, his sister, and Elson, no one was within earshot of the tent.

This was partly due to Hosmer's example, partly to that intuitive delicacy which even the roughest of men feel.

"There are many brave fellows in this party, Mr. Elson, brave, brave boys! They have been very good to me and sister; to me, on her account especially—Martha has shown so much courage and devotion! Will you not watch over her?"

"I will, I swear it!"

"I entrust her to your honor."

"I have already begged Miss Martha to become my wife," observed Francis, in a grave though tender voice.

"Yes; but then you were ignorant of her brother's shame!"

"I here again address her the same entreaty," proceeded Francis.

He turned to Martha.

"I still love you, Martha," continued he, "and I implore you to grant me the right to show my love to all eyes and to be able to protect you."

"What! would you wed a salted soldier's sister?" exclaimed Joseph.

"The salted soldier is a brave soldier," returned Francis, again taking the wounded man's hand.

"Do you hear, Martha?" said Helling, in a transport of joy. "I die contented, now that I am certain my misdeeds have not been a hindrance to your happiness. Thank you for my sister and for myself, sir. May heaven reward you for your noble conduct and the joy which you have given me in my last moments."

Notwithstanding the unspeakable delight which she had experienced on seeing Elson appear, Martha only silently pressed the hand which the young American had tendered her.

Then, her heart quivering with happiness and anguish at the same time, she had remained kneeling beside her brother, her eyes fastened with mute gladness on Mr. Elson.

The presence of strangers had prevented Francis from throwing himself on his knees beside the young girl, as he would perhaps have done in his first prompting at finding himself alone with the girl and her brother.

But the hopeless state of the latter had frozen on his lips Elson's words of love and joy which welled up from his heart.

Seeing, however, that Martha, too full of emotion to be able to speak, did not give a refusal to his proposal, Elson knelt down by the girl and prayed her not to reject the name which he offered.

He told her how he had been deceived about Joseph, and explained to her that jealousy alone had made him so harsh and stern at their last interview.

Then he related his steps towards finding her, the vicissitudes of the journey, the desperation into which the delays had driven him.

Although greatly softened and deeply grateful for this love so true and passionate, Martha persisted in refusing.

"Our positions are too different," she said; "I cannot accept such a sacrifice."

"If not for me, let it be at least for your poor brother," he proceeded, pointing to Joseph, who watched with swimming eyes the conversation of the lovers. "Would you empoison his last moments by leaving to him the idea that you remain alone and unprotected, and that he caused your unhappiness? If it is a sacrifice that I make, as you conceive, do

you not feel you have enough love to repay me?"

She could resist no longer, and her hand fell into Elson's, who uttered a joyful exclamation and pressed the girl to his heart.

Joseph Helling died a few minutes afterwards, calling down heaven's blessings on the noble young man who had espoused his sister.

He was buried on the battle-field, and his name went the rounds of the papers of the day.

They were not aware that Jose the Salted soldier and Joseph Helling, the valiant soldier, were one and the same person.

Francis Elson married Martha some months later.

Hosmer, then on the high-road to becoming a millionaire by real estate speculations, served as groom to his friend; as he had lost seven pounds during that journey, that made him forget all the privations on the road.


Elson and his wife took a trip to Europe, and I believe are there still, though purposing a return to California, which will indeed be a New World to them after the lapse even of those few years.

THE END.


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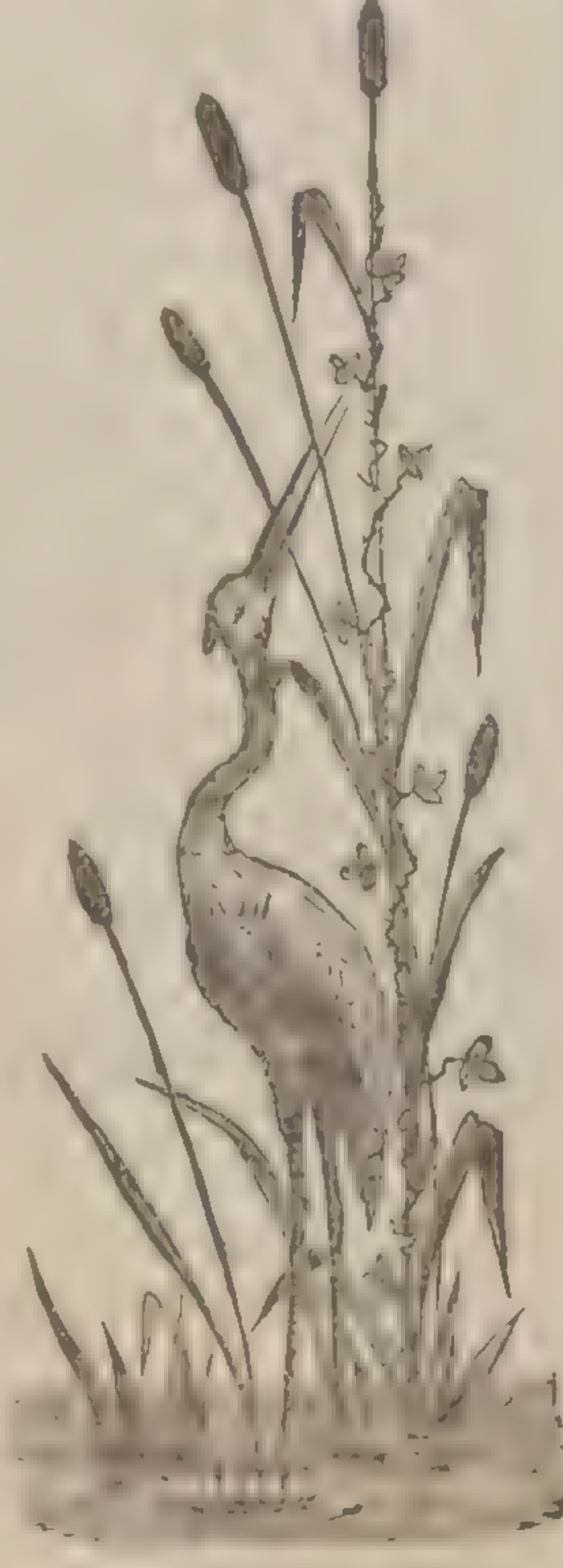
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